

TALENT MANAGEMENT THROUGH THE MANAGEMENT FASHION LENS

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Abstract

In the last two decades, Talent Management(TM) has been regarded as a crucial issue among managers, consultants and academics because it is considered a key component of the HR function and it promises to enhance organizational performance. The recent proliferation of TM-related publications has led to a general belief that TM is a well-defined area of practice supported by an extensive research and a core set of principles. However, different literature reviews and studies have shown a lack of clarity with regards to the definition, scope, empirical evidence, and overall goals leading some scholars to suggest that TM is just another management fashion (e.g. “old wines in new bottles”). In general, management fashions are transitory beliefs claiming that pursuing particular management techniques and practices will improve the performance of an organization. The importance of this phenomenon is that it often creates a bandwagon effect, leading companies to adopt practices with no assurance of their effectiveness. Therefore, this thesis aims to get a better understanding of TM by analyzing it through the management fashion lens.

This thesis employed an innovative research design that included data collected from blog posts of a well-established online HR community in the UK. The selection of the blog posts was based on predefined key words and their period of publication (2009-2014), which lead to the collection of 1236 blog posts. With regards to the analysis, the data from each of the years was first analyzed using Leximancer software, which provides both in-depth qualitative and quantitative insights into the data. Then, a comparative analysis across the years was done in order to identify evolving patterns and changes related to definitions, solutions, practices and implementation of talent management.

The empirical findings seem to generally support the assertion that talent management displays management fashion features such as vague rhetoric, no empirical evidence, re-branding (e.g. “old wine in new bottles”) and lack of clarity regarding its definition. Despite of the management fashion features displayed by TM, the discussions lead to the assumption that the TM bandwagon effect continues to grow since organizations continue to consider vital the implementation of TM for improving organizational performance. In terms of TM implementation, this study shows that there is no universal answer to what approach is the best or the most recommended. From the discussion, it seems that each organization determines the implementation of TM based on the organization's mission, culture, goals, and business context. Therefore, a better understanding of the different ways to implement TM will potentially help organizations to implement TM accordingly to their organization's context.

Keywords Talent, Talent Management, Management Fashions, Leximancer

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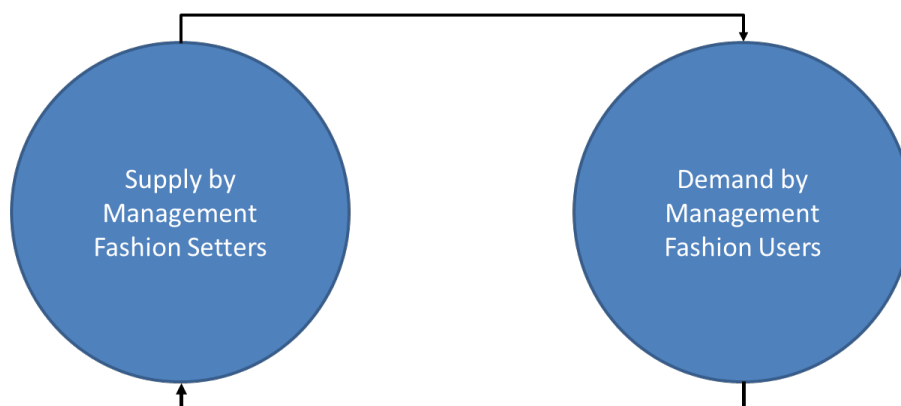
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In the recent years, there has been a surge in the number of books, periodical articles, blogs, conferences and other sources describing a specific management practice(e.g. Sigma Six, Total Quality Management, and Spaghetti Organization) as the key for performance and productivity. This phenomenon is called “management fashions” (MF). In general, management fashions are transitory beliefs that pursuing particular management techniques and practices will improve the performance of an organization (Spell, 2001; Abrahamson, 1996). The importance of this phenomenon for firms and for academics is that it often creates a bandwagon effect, leading companies to adopt practices with no assurance of their effectiveness (Spell, 2001).

The issue with management fashions is that very often they are full of vague concepts, superficial studies, and no empirical data (Iles, et al., 2010b). For those reasons, implementing the latest management fashion such as Spaghetti Organization, Management by Objectives (MBO), and Quality Circles(QCs) can have devastating effects on a company’s structure, reputation, resources and on its employees (Lang & Ohana, 2012). According to Abrahamson, management fashion setters (i.e. consultants, business leaders, management gurus) utilize a “management fashions setting process” to produce and to advertise management fashions in popular media (e.g. journals, publications, conferences, etc.) with appealing rhetoric meant to persuade the management fashion followers (e.g. line managers, HR managers, etc.) into following them. Moreover, Abrahamson describes the existence of a management fashion market where management fashions are produced by setters and consumed by the followers

Figure 1 The management fashion market is made of the supply and demand side. (Abrahamson, 1996)



For the mentioned reasons, it is important to understand to what extent the advertised outcomes of a certain management practice are evidence-based and not dictated by management fashions. Even though Abrahamson's management fashion market framework is generalized to all management fashions, the framework might have distinctive characteristics that are specific to the management technique that is traded in the market framework. Therefore, studying a certain management practice from a management fashion perspective might provide insight into novel and interesting aspects about the certain technique while developing further, what it is known about it.

In the last two decades, Talent Management (TM) has been regarded as a crucial issue among managers, consultants and academics because it is considered a key component of the HR function and, in some cases, even a new label for HRM. Very often, the terms TM and HRM are being used interchangeably since both concepts have been defined generally as "ensuring that the right person is at the right job at the right time" (Lewis & Heckman, 2006). In addition, the prominence of TM as a phenomenon is reflected in the fact that leading companies, such as IBM and Shell, see it as a major challenge since not having the right people in place and employing below-average candidates just to fill up positions have had negative impact on their businesses. (Paauwe, 2007)

According to PWC's research, one out of four CEOs indicated that they were unable to pursue a market opportunity, or had either cancelled or delayed a strategic initiative due to talent shortages (PWC, 2014). Before, during and right after the recent economic recession, TM and the search for talented people were regarded as one of the most important managerial concerns in the business world (Deloitte, 2010; Beechler & Woodward, 2009; Forbes, 2014). The PwC's 2014 global survey highlights that 80 percent of the biggest global companies have already completed or are still undergoing the implementation of some kind of talent management system (PWC, 2014) As a result, the number of TM publications (e.g. academic articles, books, conferences, etc.), mainly published by consultants, thought leaders, and business gurus alike, has increased exponentially in the last 10 years.

A search on the phrase "talent management" in late 2004 using a popular internet search engine yielded over 2,700,000 hits and, twelve years later, a search on the same term yielded over 20 million hits. The recent proliferation of TM-related publications has led to a general belief that TM is a well-defined area of practice supported by an extensive research and a core set of principles (Lewis & Heckman, 2006). However, different

literature reviews and studies have shown a lack of clarity with regards to the definition, scope, empirical evidence, and overall goals of TM leading some scholars to suggest that TM is just another management fashion, “old wines in new bottles” (Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Iles, et al., 2010b; Iles, et al., 2010a). Therefore, the mentioned issue with TM initiatives (e.g. lack of clear definition, empirical evidence, etc.) makes it attractive to study TM through the management fashion lens.

1.2 Research Problem and Gap

The known management fashions, such as Quality Circles or Sigma Six typically result in adding, eliminating, or changing practices or processes. The changes suggested by TM go beyond these relatively insignificant/harmless (e.g. eliminating a process or altering a practice) changes, potentially redefining (or threatening to reformulate) the HR function and associated academic and professional discipline. It is about changing the mindset, structures, processes and practices that are related to a firm’s overall competitive advantage, including its current and future talent (e.g. employees or skills posed by its employees) (Iles, et al., 2010a; Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Chuai, et al., 2008). Also, as personnel management (training and development) evolved to be Human Resource Management (e.g. HRM or SHRM), TM could be seen as the newest title for the HR profession (Iles, et al., 2010b).

In addition, there is limited research done on TM as MF (Iles, et al., 2010b). The most recent studies have focused on determining if TM is a management fashion by using Print Media Indicators (PMI), mainly used in the MF literature by Abrahamson, (Scarborough, et al., 2005; Iles, et al., 2010b Chuai, et al., 2008; Iles, et al., 2010a) and interviews with firms’ personnel (Chuai, et al., 2008) to a lesser extent. The PMI studies are mainly limited to studying the content of publication’s abstracts and the resulting popularity curves (rise and fall) from the number of articles published related to TM during a certain period of time.

However, the mentioned studies do not take into account the changes in TM rhetoric (e.g. different definitions of talent or changes in the practices associated to TM) as well as other issues with the TM theory (e.g. lack of clarity with regards to the definition and overall goals) that have leaded some scholars to suggest that talent management is a management fashion (Chuai, et al., 2008; Iles, et al., 2010b). For the mentioned reasons, there is the need to study TM beyond the traditional ways of studying a management technique from a MF perspective-the rise and fall of popularity trend curves in a certain period of time,

managers' perceptions and beyond the text content in the publication's abstracts (Røvik, 2011). That is why this thesis studies the HR professional's perceptions with regards TM from a management fashion perspective.

1.3 Aim of the Thesis (Research Objective and Questions)

To address the limitations of existing studies and further the understanding of the Talent Management phenomenon, this thesis aims to get a better understanding of TM by analyzing it through the management fashion lens (using the assertion that talent management is a management fashion). The study is going to investigate the evolution of TM in the 2009-2014 period within the MF market framework. This study uses an innovative research design, which utilizes HR professionals' perceptions in the blogs from one major HR online community. Although, this study is designed as mainly descriptive longitudinal blog research, it also has important explanatory elements concerning the TM phenomenon in online blog posts from a selected online community. Moreover, the large amount of data collected is analyzed with a quantitative algorithm of Leximancer software that provides both qualitative and quantitative insight into the data allowing pattern identification. By identifying evolving patterns in the data (e.g. themes, topics, relationships among them) and conducting comparative analysis, this thesis tackles the following focal question:

- Does Talent Management display features of Management Fashion?

Three following sub-questions assist in meeting the objective of this study and support the main research question; they also guide the literature review and the analysis of the empirical data.

- How are Talent and TM perceived over time in online communities?
- What solutions are offered in TM publications for satisfying the demands of management techniques for solving firm's problems and performance gaps over time?
- How does the management fashion market explain the changes in the talent management?

1.4 Scope and delimitations

The focus of this study is to examine the HR professionals' perceptions concerning talent and talent management as denoted in their online blog posts. This thesis focus only on one

major online community in the UK which has as a purpose to influence the further development of the HR function by establishing a professional standards, providing education/training, sharing best practices and informing HR practitioners about the latest trends in HR. The collected data is only limited to blog posts related to talent and talent management since the blog posts were filtered using the mentioned keywords. This means that only a limited amount of the total blog posts available in the online community are studied in this thesis. The limited amount of time and resources available for the master's thesis also influence the mentioned restriction.

In addition, the scope of this study is limited to the HR professionals' subjective evaluation, opinions and perceptions about talent and talent management. Moreover, it is not possible to evaluate the effectiveness, potential costs and economic benefits of talent management in this study since the study does not focus on that. Regarding TM practices and definition of talent, the study is not limited to a certain TM practice (e.g. recruiting or talent development, etc.) or to a certain definition of talent (e.g. talent as person or talent as skills, etc.) but rather aims to treat them as a bundle in order to identify the changes, and possible connections among them.

1. 5 Key definitions

Management Fashion: It is the relatively transitory collective belief, disseminated by management fashion setters, that a certain management technique leads the rational management progress (Abrahamson, 1996). Some examples of past management fashions are Total Quality Management (TQM), Quality Circles (QC), Business Process Reengineering, Sigma Six, and Knowledge Management.

Management Fashion Market and Management Fashion setting process: It is defined as the process by which management fashion setters or management-knowledge entrepreneurs (i.e. consultants, management gurus, business leaders, etc.) continuously redefine both their and fashion followers' collective beliefs about which management techniques are at the forefront of the rational management progress. Within the management fashion market, there is a four-step process (i.e. creation, selection, processing and dissemination) that is used by management fashion setters to create new management fashions (Abrahamson, 1996).

Management Fashion Setters: They are consulting firms, management gurus, business mass-media publications and business schools (academics). In the management fashion

market, they provide the supply of management fashions to satisfy the demand of the fashion followers. In addition, it is believed that fashion setters can also influence and shape the demand of fashion followers through the rhetoric used in their publications (Abrahamson, 1996). In this study, the management fashion setters are the authors of the all the studied publications.

Talent: There is not an absolute definition (Gallardo-Gallardo, et al., 2013) of talent since it has been used as object (i.e. a person's attribute or characteristic) or subject (i.e. person). Therefore, it can be said that the definition of the word depends on the context that it is used in. Moreover, *Chapter 2* includes a summary of the different definitions of talent throughout time and in the academic literature. Nevertheless, the definition of talent does not have a negative impact on this study.

Talent Management: It is often defined as the organized attraction, deployment, development and retention of high potential employees who are considered as a certain value for the organization (CIPD, 2007). However, there are different definitions of TM. For example, Dries found close to ten different definitions in the HRM literature. (Dries, 2013). Moreover, it seems that the definition of TM management depends on which definition of talent is used as well as in the context that it is used in. *Chapter 2* includes a review of the different ways that TM has been defined in the literature and in practice. The fact that there is not an absolute definition of TM does not have a negative impact on this study.

1. 6 Structure of the thesis

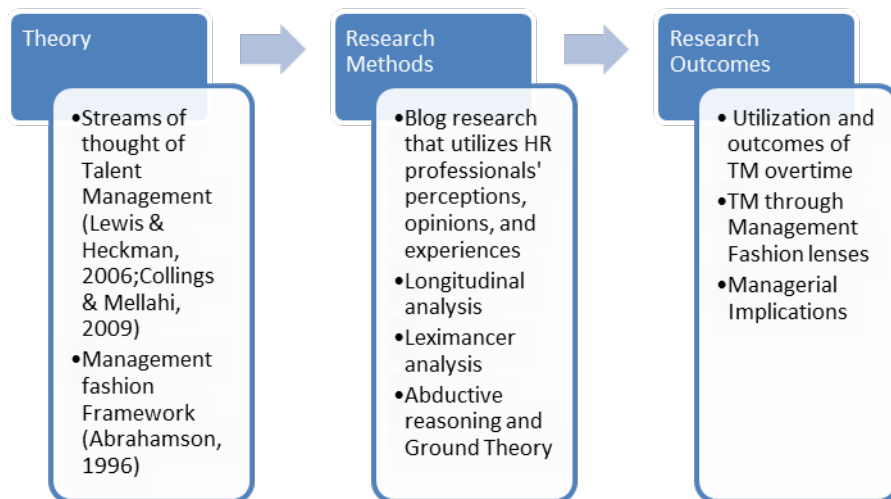
This thesis is divided in six chapters: introduction, literature review, methodology, analysis and preliminary findings, discussion and results, and conclusion.

Chapter 1 is the introduction to this thesis and it includes the background information of the study as well as its aim. *Chapter 2*, the literature review, is designed to provide the key knowledge for understanding talent management and the management fashion market framework. It starts with a review about what the management fashions are and their characteristics. Then, the different definitions of talent and talent management are reviewed and summarized. After providing the reader with enough information, talent and talent management are analyzed through the management fashion lens. Then, the management fashion framework is described in order to familiarize the reader about it.

This framework is used in the discussion for matching the empirical findings with the literature reviewed.

Chapter 3 describes the research strategy used in this study, the logic for the selection of data for answering the research questions, the approach for collecting the data and the tool, Leximancer, used for analyzing the data. *Chapter 4* consists in the preliminary results after running Leximancer. Moreover, it shows the different themes and concepts mapped in the HR professionals' blog posts. *Chapter 5* includes the discussion and the results. This chapter contains the observations of patterns in data analysis and builds the theory for explaining them. Finally, *Chapter 6* summarizes the findings, recommends potential future research topics and provides managerial recommendations and implications.

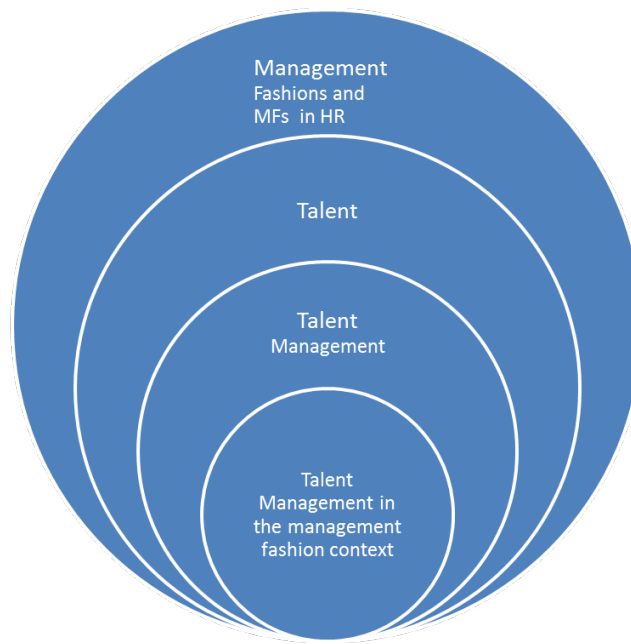
Figure 2 Structure of the Study



2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review uses a funnel approach, from the most general topic to the most specific one. The starting point is Management Fashion literature, so the reader can be familiar with management fashions as context before going into TM. Then, the focus moves to Management Fashions specific to Human Resources. In this part, HR's tendency of following management fashions is discussed. Once in the HR literature, Talent and Talent Management are analyzed. This includes a review of the different existing meanings of Talent and Talent Management in the literature. After understanding talent and TM, the reasons why TM is assumed to be a management fashion are provided. Ultimately, the framework of reference for this thesis is presented and discussed.

Figure 3 Literature review structure



2.1 Management Fashion

Management Fashions often presume to be the “perfect recipe” or “magic formula” for boosting different aspects of the firm such as productivity, profit, employee engagement and/or customer loyalty creating the belief that they are the best solution to the performance gaps created by the continuous-changing business environment. They are usually accompanied by “catchy” sentences such as “ensure your firm’s present and future competitive advantage by implementing the following process, technique or mindset” or phrases like “the game-changer solution that everyone is implementing to keep up with the competition, do not fall behind”. In general, most of us have been in contact or following a management fashion without realizing it. Some of the most famous management fashions are Sigma Six, Total Quality Management (TQM), and Knowledge Management (KM). *Table 1* lists some of the most known management fashions in the last forty years (Furnham, 2004; Abrahamson & Fairchild, 1999; Abrahamson & Eisenman, 2008; Spell, 2001; Scarbrough, et al., 2005; James, 2011).

Table 1 most known Management Fashions in the last forty years

Most know management fashion in last 40 years	
Management by objectives (MBO)	360 degree feedback
Quality Circles	Benchmarks
Business Process Reengineering	Spaghetti Organization
Job Enrichment	Knowledge Management(KM)
Total Quality Management	Just in time(JIT)

Management is not the only area discipline subject to fashions; other fields including marketing, finance, accounting, operations, as well as almost every area of technical endeavor are vulnerable to the swings of fashion (Abrahamson, 1996). One reason why it is important to study management fashions is that some of them can lead irreparable organizational consequences. For example, strategic downsizing, handmaiden of business process re-engineering, gave rise to the often disruptive and needless firing of thousands of employees (Abrahamson & Eisenman, 2008).

2.1.1 Management fashion definition and theory

In practical terms, MFs are defined as the temporary beliefs that if particular management techniques and practices are pursued, organizational performance will increase (Spell, 2001). The study of organizational ideas/techniques as a fashion has grown considerable having Eric Abrahamson and his co-authors' work (Abrahamson, 1996; Abrahamson & Fairchild, 1999; Abrahamson & Rosenkopf, 1993) as the most frequently quoted and seminal works in the management fashion literature since the early 1990s (Røvik, 2011). Academically speaking, Abrahamson has defined management fashions as “transitory collective beliefs that certain management techniques are at the forefront of the management progress” (Abrahamson, 1996).

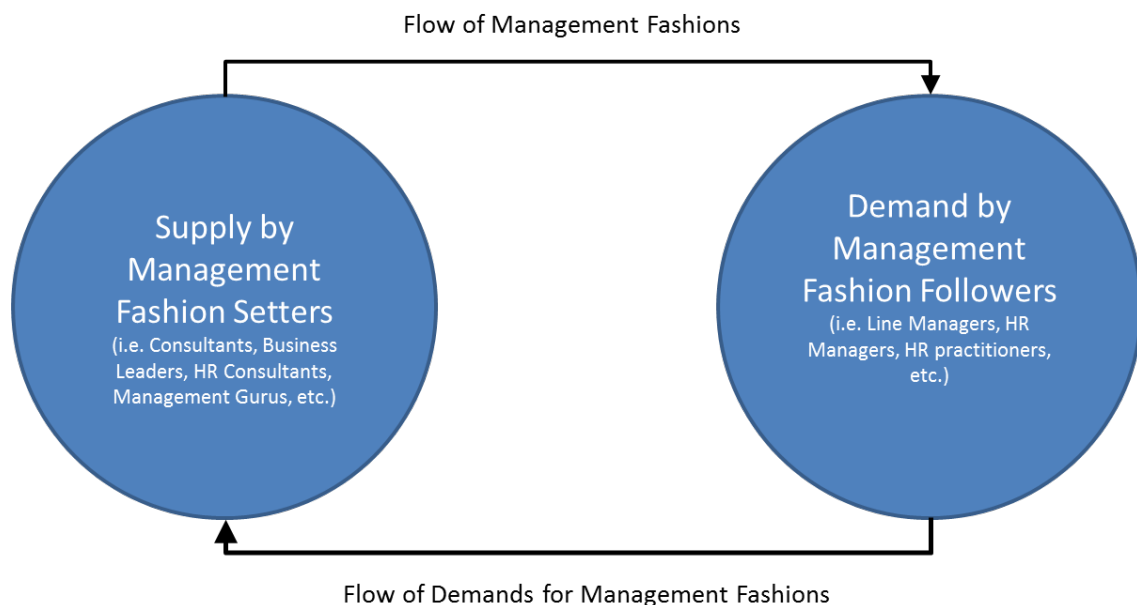
In addition, it is important to distinguish between management fashions and management fads. Both management fashions and management fads generate certain collective behavior usually known as bandwagon effect (i.e. firms adopting certain management technique). This is why there is the assumption that they are synonymous and they often are used like that. However, the terms are not equivalent and they should not be used interchangeably. While both terms generate bandwagon effect, the theory of fads and theory of fashions describe two different social processes (Abrahamson & Eisenman, 2008).

On one hand, the theory of fads suggest that a chance conjunction of social forces causes the waves of popularity of management techniques and that each wave occurs independently of each other (Abrahamson & Fairchild, 1999; Abrahamson & Eisenman, 2008; Abrahamson, 1991). On the other hand, theory of fashions suggests that waves of

¹ The article *Talent management as a management fashion in HRD: towards a research agenda* argues that TM displays MF features based on (Iles, et al., 2010a)

popularity of management techniques are related to each other and that they are the result from supply and demand in a knowledge market (Abrahamson, 1996). Moreover, the theory of fashions comes from the theory on the production of culture. In this view, organizational systems sense popular demand and both supply and broadcast cultural forms that satiate this popular demand (Hirsch, 1972). This means that fashion setting organizations (e.g. consulting firms, business media, etc.) and fashion setters (e.g. consultants, business leaders, management gurus, etc.) constitute the supply side of an institutionalized fashion-setting market, whereas fashion followers constitute the market's demands side (Abrahamson & Eisenman, 2008).

Figure 4 Management Fashion Market (Abrahamson, 1996)



In the management fashion market, the fashion setters analyze the followers' demand, create fashionable management techniques and broadcast them to the fashion followers. The rhetoric used in the setters' broadcastings is what leads to adoption, of a certain management technique by the fashion followers.

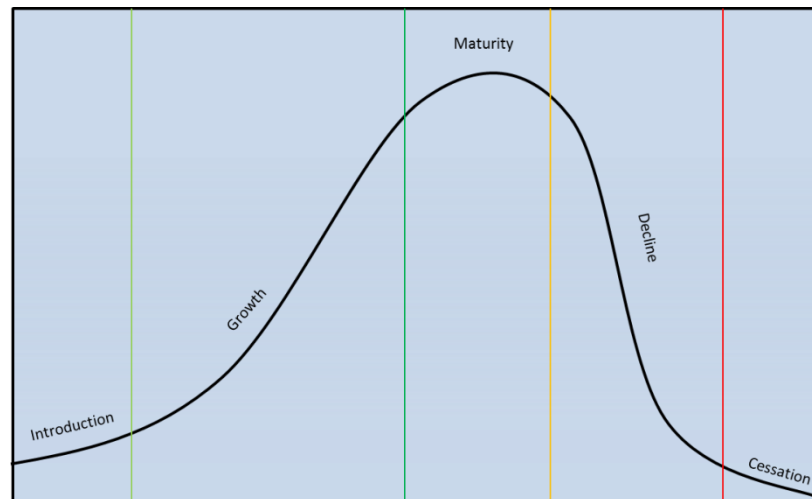
The present study uses the theory of fashion's definition as lens for studying Talent Management. This means that management fashions are assumed to be the result of a supply and demand in a knowledge market as it is described by Hirsch (1972) and later refined by Abrahamson and Eisenman (2008).

2.1.2 Management Fashion Characteristics

Most management fashions share some specific characteristics that identify them and make them unique (allowing to differ/distinguish them from similar phenomena such as fads).

These characteristics include their lifespan, use of vague rhetoric, crucial role of promoters/setters, and effects on the followers. First, management fashions have finite duration (i.e. one fashion cannot last forever), follow a life cycle (e.g. introduction, growth, maturity, decline and cessation) and are transitory (Williams, 2004).

Figure 5 Management Fashion life cycle (Williams, 2004)



Like aesthetic fashions, management fashions need to be attractive and modern, but must also seem to be both rational (i.e. efficient means to important ends) and progressive (i.e. new and relatively improved technique with respect to the current management techniques) (Abrahamson, 1996). This is the main difference between MFs and aesthetic fashions. MF setters heavily use rhetoric for targeting the followers' demands, preferences and needs making MFs seem rational and progressive. MF setters' rhetoric often articulate (1) why it is imperative for managers to pursue a certain goal (i.e. knowledge transfer, talent development, employee engagement, etc.) and (2) why this technique provides the most efficient means to attain the mentioned goals (Abrahamson, 1996). In addition, Abrahamson has recognized three types of rhetoric arguments used by MF setters to make it seem rational:

Table 2 Rhetoric arguments commonly used by management fashion setters (Abrahamson, 1996)

Types of rhetoric arguments used by MF setters	
1-	Descriptions of techniques whose usage by few currently successful companies are used to justify the claims about the efficiency of these techniques in narrowing performance gaps for all companies.
2-	Quasi-theoretical statements of how these techniques cause performance gaps to narrow
3-	Full-fledged empirically validated, scientific theories of the causes of such effects

Moreover, MFs must seem not only rational but also progressive (i.e. innovative). In order to do so, MF setters often make comparisons between the MF they are advertising and the current established techniques. Scientific evidence is carefully used and articulated for making the MFs seem more innovative than the management techniques currently used (Abrahamson, 1996). However, most MFs' claims are often based on weak data and anecdote evidence from successful companies (Lewis & Heckman, 2006). Therefore, it seems that MF setters carefully arrange arguments and scientific evidence for their own convenience and for convincing MF followers that their advertised technique is attractive, modern, rational and progressive.

According to the theory of MF, the emergence and fall of a certain MF is accompanied by an increase or decrease in number of publications. The ups and downs in the number of publications often produce a bell shape curve which is similar to the popularity curves in styles of, for instance, woman dresses or men beards (Abrahamson, 1996; Brickely, et al., 1997). The swings in the number of publications show the positive or negative noise made around a certain fashion, which is a good indication of how much interest there is in a given management technique (Abrahamson, 1996; Lang & Ohana, 2012). In addition, a "bandwagon" effect is a result of the dissemination of a certain management fashion (Hirsch, 1972). This means that as the number of publications raises, the number of companies that adopt the management fashion increases too.

A similar effect it is seen when the number of publication decreases; the number of companies using the management technique decreases too. This was tested by Abrahamson's study regarding Quality Circles'(QCs) publications. In the 1980s, the number of QCs' publications listed in the *ABI inform* database shown a bell-shaped curve (Abrahamson, 1996). This rise in the number of QCs' publications was accompanied with a QC's adoption rate of 30 percent in 1982 and 90 percent in 1985 of the Fortune 500 companies. However, 80 percent of the Fortune 500 companies that adopted QCs had abandoned them by 1987. At the same time that the number of QCs' publications had started to decline back to the pre-popularity level (Abrahamson, 1996).

Like aesthetic in fashion do, management fashions tend to come in waves meaning that one falling fashion is substituted by an emerging fashion (Lang & Ohana, 2012). For example, Abrahamson and Fairchild studied how four different management fashions (e.g. job enrichment, quality circles, total quality management and business process reengineering) behaved in the 1966-1996 period. In their study, they discovered that when the number of

articles about one management fashion was falling, the number of articles published on another management fashion was increasing (Abrahamson & Fairchild, 1999, pg 723). In other words, job enrichment was replaced by quality circles. Then, total quality management substituted quality circles and business process reengineering was rising as a fashion when total quality management was falling. This also shows the transitory nature of management fashion. It is believed that one management technique cannot be seen at the forefront of the management process if the technique has been around for too long.

Another interesting characteristic regarding management fashion is that sometimes the “new management fashion” is just another old management fashion rediscovered or repacked in under a new name (Abrahamson, 1996; Spell, 2001; Abrahamson & Fairchild, 1999; Iles, et al., 2010b; Cappelli, 2008). This is also known as “old wine in new bottles” phenomenon. (Cappelli, 2008). For example, quality circles integrated elements of older fashions such as group leadership, team work, problem-solving, interviewing, delegating and public speaking (Huczynski, 1993). This is also the case of pay for performance and management by objectives (MBO). Both share the general idea but they were launched as different management fashions in different periods of times (Spell, 2001). The table below summarizes the MF characteristics.

Table 3 Summary of Management Fashions Characteristics

Characteristic	Description
Rational and Progressive	Like aesthetic fashions, MFs need to look modern and attractive. However, they need to be both rational(efficient means to important ends) and progressive(new and relatively improved technique with respect to the current management techniques).
Lifecycle	MFs have a life cycle. The are introduction, growth, maturity, decline and cessation. Academics have studied these lifecycles using PMI(Print Media Indicators). See (Abrahamson & Fairchild, 1999), (Iles, et al., 2010b).and (Abrahamson & Eisenman, 2008)
Transitory	MFs have a finite-life. One technique cannot be consired at the forefront of the innovation process if it has been around for too long
Bandwagon Effect	MFs create a movement in which firms start implementing them. Firms that do not implement them might seem to be falling behind the ones that have implemented them.
Advertised by MF Setters	Very often, MFs are pushed by consultants, HR consultants, business leaders and management gurus. They are seldom advertised by academics or line managers.

Come in waves	One MF is replaced by another supposedly improved newer MF. In other words, MFs do not just disappear.
Rhetoric	MF setters use rhetoric for making MFs seem to be attractive, rational and progressive. Most of rhetoric used articulates (1) why it is imperative for managers to pursue a certain goal (i.e. knowledge transfer, talent development, employee engagement, etc.) and (2) why this technique provides the most efficient means to attain the mentioned goals
Lack of Empirical Data	MFs are very often supported by anecdotes and success stories about the firms that have implemented. However, sound empirical evidence is very often lacking.
Old wine in new bottles	It is when old management techniques are repackaged or rediscovered and launched as the newest MF.

2.1.3 Impact of management fashions on organizations

Management fashions are important because they shape the management techniques that thousands of managers look up to in order to face real managerial problems and challenges. For that reason, companies and government institutions are constantly trying to re-adapt their structures, cultures and mindset in order to implement the latest management fashion. Often that re-adaptation requires “reengineering” or “downsizing” the number of employees meaning laying off employees (Abrahamson, 1996). This has a direct impact on the company’s structure as well as on its employees. Sometimes these changes are helpful, but sometimes they have a devastating effect on company’s structure, reputation and its employees. For these reasons, managers need to be warned that some of the rhetoric used in advertising certain management fashions can be full of false promises and recipes that are counterproductive for companies (Lang & Ohana, 2012). Therefore, the decision of adopting a management fashion should not be taken lightly.

2.1.4 Why firms and managers follow management fashions

There seems to be a general belief that adopting a management fashion is less risky than inventing a new solution. In addition, large positive press published in mass media channels such as blogs, magazines and journals accompanies MFs. The rhetoric used in the press is full of new concepts that sound very innovative, full of promises to solve the firm’s current problems, and firms’ success stories (Iles, et al., 2010b). These give managers and CEOs the perception that the firm will succeed after implementing a MF. Therefore, it seems rational to prefer implementing a technique that has succeeded in another firm, especially if the firm that implemented it is an industry leader or a firm

considered innovative (i.e. Apple, P &G and Google). This imitation phenomenon between firms has been studied in the literature and it is called mimetic isomorphism as in institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

In addition, academics have theorized the motives behind MFs' implementations. Røvik and Abrahamson have provided an academy answer to the question: Why firms and managers follow and implement management fashions?. On one hand, Røvik has recognized three motivations that encourages managers to adopt management fashions: (i) real organizational problems, (ii) externally triggered problem descriptions (e.g. financial crisis), and (iii) attempts to strengthen the corporate identity (2000). On the other hand, Abrahamson argues that firms and managers choose to implement the latest MF as a result of sociopsychological and technoeconomical forces which creates the demand for MFs.

According to Abrahamson, sociopsychological forces explain three motives about why firms and managers seek and implement MFs. Firstly, managers demand MFs to appear individualistic and novel, relative to the mass of managers who are out of fashion (e.g. managers that like conformity and traditionalism). However, what it is new and individualist ineluctably becomes old and common with the passage of time and with the growing number of adherents to a fashion. Therefore, MFs will always be in demand to feed managers' insatiable appetites for individuality and novelty (Abrahamson, 1996).

Secondly, managers' are prone to frustration and despair in a collectively loosens normal institutional constraints on their behavior renders them vulnerable to unrealistic hopes that quasi-magical solutions will relieve their sources of frustration (Gill & Whittle, 1992). For example, Japanese firms' success during the 1980s created frustration among U.S. managers increasing the demand and the implementation for a new MF such as Quality Circles for competing with the Japanese firms (Mitroff & Mohrman, 1987).

Thirdly, there is the belief that adopting MFs is not only about being in fashion but to distinguish high-status and low-status managers. In other words, managers of higher reputation organizations adopt MFs to distinguish their organizations from lower reputation organizations (Abrahamson, 1996). Therefore, managers demand MFs in order to be seen as individualistic/novel, to overcome frustration/despair and to distinguish themselves and their companies from lower reputation managers and firms.

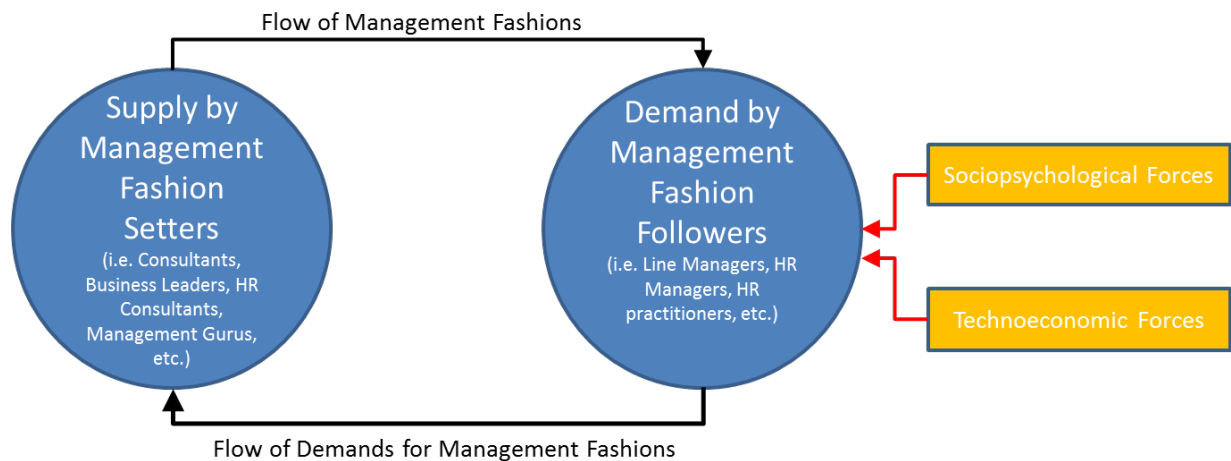
Technoeconomic forces also explain the demand and implementation of MFs. Abrahamson argues that technical and environmental changes create emerging preferences among

fashion followers (e.g. managers) for certain types of management techniques that they find useful in narrowing the performance gaps (1996). Firstly, macroeconomic fluctuations affect what types of demands managers and firms want. For example, Barley and Kunda's review of historians' work show that during economic expansion periods (e.g. high profits) firms and managers invested and implemented MFs that favored the efficient use of structures and technologies as a means of increasing labor productivity. On the contrary, firms and managers demanded and implemented MFs that favored employee relations as means of increasing labor productivity during periods of economic contraction (1992).

Secondly, changes in legislation also influence the demand of management fashions (Abrahamson, 1996). For example, changes in labor legislation might require new control methods creating the demand for a MF that offers to comply with the new legislation in a practical and a cost-efficient way. Thirdly, anxiety generated by environmental changes (i.e. new technologies, economic recessions, etc.) open up performance gaps across organizations. (Abrahamson & Fairchild, 1999; Turner & Killian, 1986). The anxiety among managers and the drive to find solutions to performance gaps increase the chances of managers picking up any all-powerful and quasi-magical management solutions (i.e. management fashion such as quality circles, talent management, etc.) promoted by prestigious MF setters. Therefore, technoeconomic forces (e.g. new technologies, new legislations, environmental changes, manager's anxiety, etc.) affect the demand and implementation of MFs.

These forces are included in Abrahamson's management fashion market which is the framework used later in this thesis to analyze the changes in the rhetoric used in the HR professionals' blog posts. The framework is described in *section 2.4* before the methodology section.

Figure 6 Sociopsychological and Technoeconomic forces in the Management fashion market (Abrahamson, 1996)



2.1.5 Management Fashions in HR

The discipline of Human Resource management has continuously struggled to be considered important and strategic for the firms' top management. Too often, HR professionals and scholars have had a difficult time linking the HR function (e.g. activities, practices, strategies, etc.) to the firms' overall performance and strategy (Caldwell, 2003). In the academic world, scholars have brought up main issues with HR such as the lack of sound theory as well as the methodological issues in HR empirical studies (Delery & Doty, 1996; Paauwe, 2009). In the business world, HR professionals have constantly looked for credibility, recognition and status in the eyes of executives, senior managers and employees (Wright, 2008; Legge, 1995). Therefore, both academics and HR professionals strive to get HR the recognition that they believe it deserves. The constant HR fight for the righteous recognition and for "the seat at top management table" has generated frustration and desire for innovation among those in the HR discipline/occupation. As suggested by Abrahamson, frustration and the desire to be seen as innovative are two of the sociopsychological forces that drive the demand for MFs making those in the HR profession vulnerable to MFs.

The idea of HR being vulnerable to the effect of management fashions is not something new since it is a trend recognized both in the academic and practitioner literature (Boudreau & Rice, 2015). According to Pascal, finding, adopting and then abruptly dropping the "latest and greatest" organizational improvement or HRD program is a widely recognized phenomenon (1991). One of the reasons is that HR professionals are accused of falling for panacea solutions, (e.g. some management fashions), leading to a poor

reputation in delivering real long-term benefits for the firms (Short, et al., 2003). In many cases, the panacea solutions lack sound evidence (i.e. studies) and robust theory, which are some of the key MF characteristics mentioned in *section 2.1.2* (Swanson, 2001). Scholars like Short, Keefer, and Stone claim that instead of turning into models and theories from a body of understanding of what works and why, HR professionals seemed to be turning to MF-driven body of literature that can best be described as *what sells*' (Short, et al., 2009). In other words, HR professionals try to follow the latest management techniques that seem to be in the forefront of the management progress.

Over the years, the HR function has changed its title more than a few times. Some of the most known titles are personnel management, employee development, workforce development, HRD, and HRM. These changes in occupation's title are supposed to reflect changing conceptions about the nature of the discipline/occupation (Iles, et al., 2010b). However, some argue that the terms describe the same domain (i.e. management of personnel) and are not significantly different from each other (Legge, 1995). It seems that the HR executives are continuously repacking and renaming themselves to appear progressive and rational. In other words, old wine in new bottles.

Changes in the rhetoric are assumed an effort to make HR discipline/occupation look like as one of the main organizational performance's contributors increasing its credibility, reputation and status of the discipline/occupation. Nevertheless, some scholars argue that the latest repacked name of HR is TM (Iles, et al., 2010b). These authors argue that the HR function should implement and control TM within the firm because TM is supposed to be the best technique for managing the firm's most important asset, people/talent, leading to above the average performance and sustainable development of the firm. These promises sound very similar to what it was said about SHRM, HRD and any other HR solutions/techniques at the time they emerged. All of them were aimed to make HR function more strategic and important in the firm. Therefore, it is important to analyze the TM phenomenon as well as the literature around it.

2.2 Talent

There is not an absolute answer to the question: What is talent? In the management literature, there are a considerable number of different definitions of the term talent (Gallardo-Gallardo, et al., 2013). It seems that TM scholars are rarely precise about what exactly they mean by talent because there are widely held implicit theories about what talent is (Barab & Plucker, 2002). Moreover, it appears that talent can mean whatever a

business leader or scholar or consultant wants it to mean. Everyone has his or her own idea of what the concept does and does not encompass (Ulrich, 2011). As a consequence, there is not a consensus about the definition of talent and that is one of the biggest criticism of the TM literature (Lewis & Heckman, 2006). Managing something without knowing what it is or how it could be defined sounds like a very challenging situation for anyone. This is why it is important to look at the different definitions of talent in the literature before discussing talent management.

The origin of the term talent can be traced back to the Greek word *talanton* τάλαντον which was one of several ancient units of mass, especially used for precious metals, evolving into a currency used by the Babylonians, Assyrians, Greeks and Romans (Cresswell, 2009; Darwill, 2008). The term talent has been around over a thousand years and it has held different meanings during its existence. From the nineteenth century forward, the usage of talent can be divided on two general categories, object and subject approaches. On one hand, the object approach is when the term talent refers to a person's attribute or characteristic. On the other hand, the subject approach is when the term talent refers to a person. Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries, and Gonzalez-Cruz have divided even further the two general approaches to the definition of talent (2013). The classification is based on how the term talent has been used by scholars, consultants and business leaders within the object and subject approaches.

Object approach:

In the talent as an object approach, scholars distinguished the term talent as natural ability, mastery of systematically developed skills, commitment/motivation, and a fit between an individual's talent and the workplace context. The last two are seen as complementary to either version of talent, as natural ability or mastery.

The usage of talent as a natural ability is part of the nature-nurture debate. Whether talent is more on the nature or on the nurture side has a big impact on how talent can be managed or not (Meyers, et al., 2013). There are scholars that argue that while skills and knowledge are relatively easy to teach, talent pertains to characteristics more enduring and unique, making quasi-impossible to learn it or teach it (Buckingham & Vosburgh, 2001). Therefore, considering talent to be innate nature makes that task of managing it relatively impossible and that is why some scholars such as Davies and Davies suggested that organizations should focus on the enablement of talent (2010). This conceptualization of

talent is aligned with “the war for talent” since it considers talent to be innate and unable to be developed making firms and HR professionals focus on recruitment, identification and retention of certain talents (people’s characteristics) (Meyers, et al., 2013).

Talent as mastery opposes the view of talent as innate ability since it focuses on deliberate practice and learning from experience. Talent is seen as something that can be acquired even if a person was not born with it. In other words, “experts are always made, not born” (Meyers, et al., 2013; Ericsson, 2007). In the TM literature, it seems that there is some agreement on 10 000 hours of focused and deliberate practice as the requirement for attaining “talented” level of performance (Ericsson, 2006; Briscoe & Hall, 1999; Gallardo-Gallardo, et al., 2013). However, it is understood that not everybody has the same potential, but it is believed that everybody can reach “talented” performance by practicing. As a result, the HR professionals who agreed with the previous statement focus on training and development.

Moreover, another object approach to talent focuses on commitment, both for one’s work and to one’s organization. The talent as commitment to one’s work is described as something intrinsic to a person that directs focus, attention, and dedication (Pruis, 2011). Also, this view of talent describes talent to something related to will, perseverance, commitment, interest and passion leading a person to successfully completing projects that most others would abandon or never even start (Nieto, et al., 2011; Weiss & Mackay, 2009). In the talent as commitment to one’s organization, talent is seen as the employees’ willingness to invest discretionary energy into their company’s success leading to the alignment of employees’ personal goals with the company goals (Gallardo-Gallardo, et al., 2013; Ulrich, 2007). As mentioned before, talent as a commitment is complementary to natural ability and/or mastery conceptualizations since most publications do not declare talent equals commitment (Gallardo-Gallardo, et al., 2013; Ulrich & Smallwood, 2012)

The last object approach to talent refers talent as a fit between the person’s talent and the context (i.e. the right position, the right people, the right place and/or right time) in which the person works. This view emphasizes the importance of the context since it implies that the meaning of talent is relative rather than absolute. It is argued that the same talented individual can perform above average under certain organizational context while performing below the average in another context (Gonzalez-Cruz, et al., 2009). The performance depends on the immediate environment, the received leadership and work

team (Iles, 2008). Therefore, a person's fit to the organizational context should be considered while designing the talent management strategy.

Subject approach:

It refers to a talented person rather to a person's quality (Gallardo-Gallardo, et al., 2013). Moreover, the subject approach can be split into two approaches, the inclusive and exclusive approach (Iles, et al., 2010b).

The inclusive approach refers to everyone in the company as talent. In this approach, every single person working in the company has their own strengths and it is capable of creating an added value for the company (Buckingham & Vosburgh, 2001). Many companies believe that every single employee's talent is required in order to create value added products and services (Gallardo-Gallardo, et al., 2013). Therefore, the entire workforce rather than a small group of employees or specific technology is seen as the main determinant of organizational performance. Moreover, supporters of this view argue that the inclusive approach generates what is called the "Mark Effect" which is beneficial for the organizations that have implemented a strength-based approach to talent management. The Mark Effect creates a more pleasant, collegial, and motivating work climate by treating everyone in the organization as equals. Besides this "great" climate for employees, the mentioned effect guarantees an egalitarian distribution of resources among all the employees increasing employees' morale (Gallardo-Gallardo, et al., 2013).

In contrast to the inclusive approach, the exclusive approach to talent focus on an elite group of employees rather than the entire workforce who are believed to be the current or future source of value for the organization (Tansley, 2011). This approach can be divided on the notion of current or future performance, high performers and high potentials.

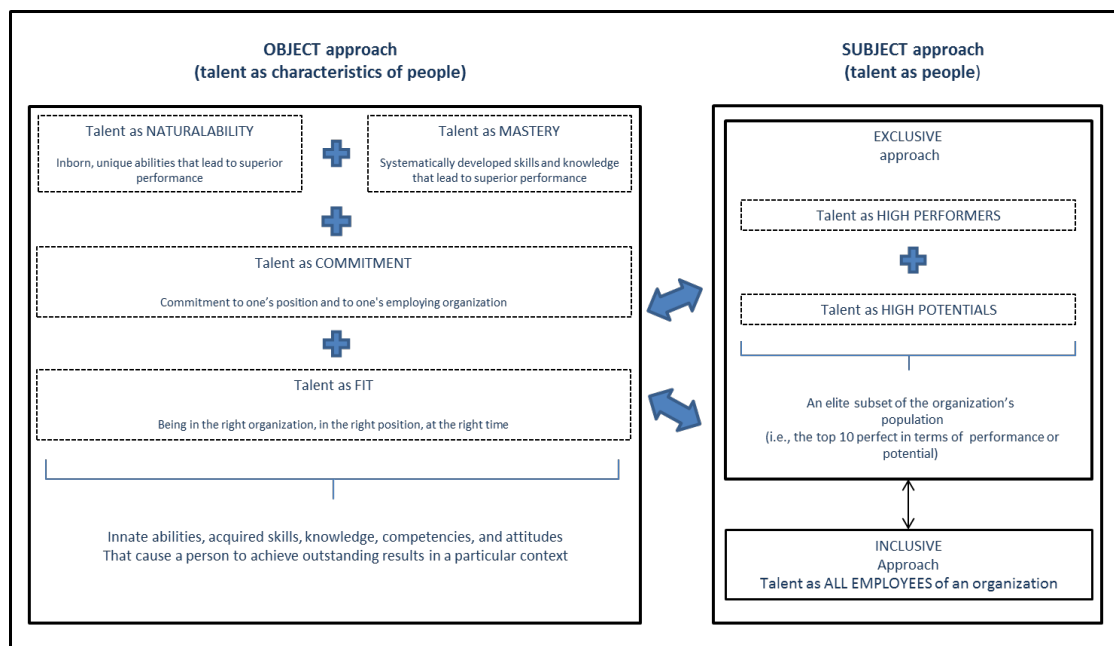
On one hand, the high performers are defined as a group of elite employees rank "the best of the class" and they are the most exceptional in terms of skills and abilities either in a specific area, a specific competence, or a more general area (Gallardo-Gallardo, et al., 2013; Silzer & Dowell, 2010). Another common name for the elite group is "A players" and they are considered the single most important driver for organizational performance (Smart, 2005). On the other hand, the high potentials are a select group of employees who demonstrates a high level potential, especially in the future. In contrast with the high performers, this group is seen as the group of employees that will perform above average in the future once their skills and abilities have been nurtured. In other words, high

potentials are those employees believed to have the potential to advance at faster pace than their peers while demonstrating different needs, motivations, and behaviors than “regular” employees (Pepermans, et al., 2003)

Even though the mentioned framework for the conceptualization of talent seems to cover the different approaches to defining talent, there are different studies that help to make sense of the meaning of talent. For example, the 2004 Towers Perrins’ survey showed that 80 percent of the 32 companies surveyed used an official standardized talent definition through the organization. However, none of 32 companies used the same talent definition demonstrating that the talent definition is adopted depending on the organizations’ business strategy, the type of the firm, the overall competitive environment and other factors (Iles, et al., 2010a; CIPD, 2007). Knowing different ways that the term talent can be defined or operationalized helps to increase the understanding of how the term talent can be used as well as to provide new directions for the future research. In practice, how firms define talent impact directly their TM strategy and practices (Meyers, et al., 2013).

Being familiar with the different definitions or approaches to talent is important for understanding the HR professionals’ perceptions of talent and talent management embedded on collected blogs for this study. Nevertheless, talent often refers to above-average performance regardless of the approach used to the definition of talent.

Figure 7 Framework for the conceptualization of talent (Gallardo-Gallardo, et al., 2013)



2.3 Talent Management

As the task of defining the term talent was not easy, universally defining the term talent management is equally challenging. The reason is there are different definitions of TM in the literature. *Figure 8* shows close to ten different definitions of talent management that were found in the HRM literature by Dries. (Dries, 2013). However, the CIPD defines TM as the organized attraction, deployment, development and retention of high potential employees who are of a particular value to an organization (CIPD, 2007). In contrast, several articles define talent management as a “mindset” (Creelman, 2004); key component for effective succession planning (Cheloha & Swain, 2005); and, an effort for ensuring that every employee at all the organizational levels works to the top of their potential. Even though there is no consensus among the TM authors regarding the definition of TM, more than half of the CEOs interviewed in PricewaterhouseCoppers’ 17th annual Global survey show that TM is one of the top priorities (PWC, 2014).

Figure 8 Different definitions of talent management in HRM literature (Dries, 2013)

Reference	Definition of talent management
2003 Sloan, Hazucha, & Van Katwyk	"Managing leadership talent strategically, to put the right person in the right place at the right time" (P. 236)
2004 Pascal	"Talent management encompasses managing the supply, demand, and flow of talent through the human capital engine" (p.9)
2005 Ashton & Morton	"TM is a strategic and holistic approach to both HR and business planning or a new route to organizational effectiveness. This improves the performance and the potential of people-the talent- who can make a measurable difference to the organization now and in the future. And it aspires to yield enhanced performance among all levels in the workforce, thus allowing everyone to reach his/her potential, no matter what that might be" (p.30)
2005 Duttagupta	"In the broadest possible terms, TM is the strategic management of the flow of talent through an organization. Its purpose is to assure that a supply of talent is available to align the right people with the right jobs at the right time based on strategic business objectives" (p.2)
2006 Warren	"In he broadest sense, the term can be seen as the identification, development, engagement, retention and deployment of talent, although it is often used more narrowly to describe the short - and longer- term resourcing of senior executives and high performers" (p.26)
2007 Jerusalem & Hausdorf	"High potential identification and development (also known as talent management) refers to the process by which an organiation identifies and develops employees who are potentially able to move into leadership roles sometime in the future" (p. 934)
2008 Cappelli	"At its heart, talent management is simply a matter of anticipating the need for human capital and setting out a plan to meet it" (p.1)
2009 Collings & Mellahi	"We define strategic talent management as activities and processes that involve the systematic identification of key positions which differentially contribute to the organization's sustainable competitive advantage, the development of a talent pool of high potentials and high-performing incumbents to fill these roles, and the development of a differentiated human resource architecture to facilitate filling these positions with competent incumbents and to ensure their continued commitment to the organization" (p.2)
2010 Slizer & Dowell	"Talent management is an integrated set of processes, programs, and cultural norms in an organization designed and implemented to attract, develop, deploy, and retain talent to achieve strategic objectives and meet future business needs" (p.18)

Furthermore, Lewis and Heckman found three key streams of thought regarding the definition of TM in their literature review (2006). The first stream refers to TM just as a newer label or rebranding for HRM. In other words, TM is the same traditional HR work done faster with the use of technologies such as systems and the internet. In addition, this literature limits its focus on HR practices such as recruitment, development, selection, succession planning and career development. The second stream emphasizes talents pools

highlighting a set of processes designed to ensure an adequate flow of employees into jobs throughout the organization in order to satisfy the current and future staffing needs. This literature is built mainly on the early research on manpower planning and succession planning literatures (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Lewis & Heckman, 2006).

The third stream refers to the management of talented people. This literature argues that all the roles within the organization should be filled with “A performers”, also known as “top grading” (Smart, 2005) and highlights pushing the “C performers” or low performers out of the organization (Michaels, et al., 2001; Lewis & Heckman, 2006). Moreover, Collings and Mellahi argue that there is a four emerging stream that focuses on the identification of key positions which have the potential to significantly impact the competitive advantage of the firm (2009). This stream argues that identifying key positions should be done before identifying the talented people. Once the key positions are identified, talent pools of high performers or/and high potential should be created to fulfill the positions (Collings & Mellahi, 2009)

Figure 9 Four identified streams of TM in the literature

Four TM Streams in the literature. (Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Collings & Mellahi, 2009)	
1-	TM is just a newer label or rebranding for HRM. In other words, TM is not essential different from HRM.
2-	TM focus on talent pools based on succession planning and manpower planning.
3-	TM as the management of talented people. Talent is considered and unqualified and undifferentiated good. This includes practices such as top grading and it pays special focus to high performers or high potential
4-	TM focuses on key positions that make the biggest impact in the firm’s performance and it requires the creations of talent pools (high performers or high potentials) for filling those positions

The mentioned four talent management streams of thought are important for the empirical part of this thesis since it helps the researcher to understand better the perceptions of the HR professionals. In addition, the first stream of thought is the stream that often leads to the assumption that talent management is a management fashion.

Moreover, talent management fits the criteria of a “phenomenon” since there is no currently available theory that has enough scope to capture its different elements or cause-and-effect relationships, and no methodological approach is considered superior to others

(Hambrick, 2007; Dries, 2013). In 1990s, McKinsey consultants published a report titled “War for Talent”, seen as the genesis of Talent Management (Tansley et al., 2013), making the term “Talent Management” one of the most common terms in the managerial lexicon (Minbaeva & Collings, 2013). The one-year study included the information from 77 US companies from different industries and nearly 6000 managers and executives, supplemented by case studies of 20 companies. McKinsey’s study concluded that the most important corporate resource over the next years would be smart, sophisticated business people who are technologically literate, globally astute, and operationally agile. For McKinsey talent is “a sum of the person’s abilities... his or her instructs gifts, skills, knowledge, experience, judgment, drive and ability to learn” (Michaels, et al., 2001). This “war” is based on three basic assumptions: individual talent or ability is mostly fixed and invariant; people can be reliably sorted on their abilities and competence, and organizational performance is mostly the simple aggregation of individual performance (Beechler & Woodward, 2009).

Not only consultant companies have become interested on studying talent related topic but scholars have become interested too. In total, 7000 articles have been published regarding talent Management from the late 1990s to the end of 2013. However, only 100 of them were published in academic journals and identified “talent management” as key words (Dries, 2013). Therefore, it can be assumed, from the beginning, that talent management has been pushed by practitioners, business leaders and consultants rather than scholars. It seems that scholars have lagged behind in studying TM but this fact has not reduced the growing number of non-academic publications and the growing interest of the general public (Dries, 2013)

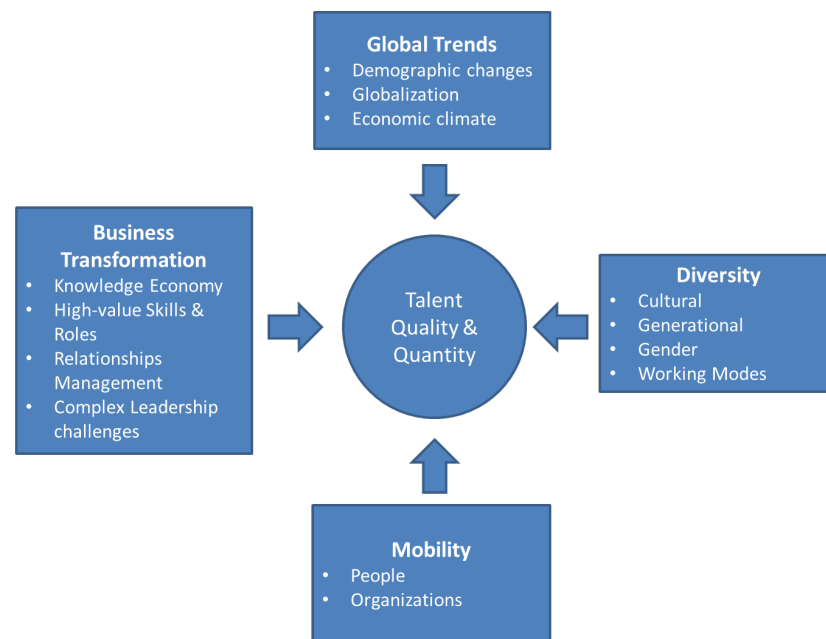
2.3.1 Why is Talent Management important?

Talent is seen as one of the main contributors to an organization’s competitive advantage due to its rare and inimitable nature that cannot be copied by the organization’s competitors (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Dries, 2013). In addition, TM is believed to be fundamental for employee engagement, which increases productivity, innovation, employee satisfaction, and employee retention (Morton, et al., 2005). During the 2008 financial crisis, organizations were cutting cost by firing employees and reducing expenditure on training. As result of the massive lay-offs, the amount of work increased for those who stayed employed while the level of employee motivation declined. Therefore, retaining and motivating the remaining employees became a priority. This forced

organizations to design and to implement better talent management strategies for short and long term in order to keep up with the competition (Beechler & Woodward, 2009).

Moreover, it is believed that TM aid companies to reduce the negative impact of the factors that affect the quantity, quality, and the characteristics of talent. Beechler and Woodward argued that there are four factors that have contributed to the War on Talent and increased the interest of companies in TM (2009).

Figure 10 Factors that influence the War on Talent (Beechler & Woodward, 2009)



The first factor is the global demographic trends. Increasing longevity and declining birthrates, especially in developed economies, are forces that are driving an unprecedented shift in the age distribution of the general population. In many countries the replacement rate are below 2.1 children per women required to maintain population levels. (Beechler & Woodward, 2009). This affects the supply of future employees reducing organizations' future talent supply. Therefore, companies must anticipate their talent needs as well as increase their effort for finding the talent that they need.

The second factor is the increasing mobility of people and organizations. Globalization has facilitated the reduction of migration barriers increasing the relocation of people throughout the globe. Also, there is a considerable flow of the skilled workers moving from developing economies to developed economies due to the talent scarcity in latter ones. This means that developing economies are experiencing what is called "brain drain" creating talent shortages also there (The Economist, 2006). This means that both developed

and developing economies are struggling to attract and to retain talented people. Due to this increased in mobility, the TM strategies cannot be limited only to the organization's domestic market forcing organizations to create more complex international strategies to attract, to develop and to retain talent.

The third factor is the transformational changes to business environment, skills, and cultures. Countries are moving from product based to a knowledge based economies which has a direct impact on the type of talent needed by organizations. Intangible assets (i.e. patents and know-how) are becoming more popular worldwide. It already represented 70 % of the value of S&P 500 companies in 2009 (The Economist, 2006). In addition, the worldwide service sector was already providing 43% of the jobs in 2008 (ILO, 2008). As a result, companies are hiring more workers for more complex works requiring higher cognitive ability while they are reorganizing themselves to hire, to develop, to deploy and to retain their most valuable knowledge workers (Beechler & Woodward, 2009). In contrast, talented employees have become more valuable and less long-term committed to one company increasing the employees' power over their employers (Beechler & Woodward, 2009). Therefore, organizations need to increase their efforts to retain valuable employees in the long term.

The last fourth factor is the growing levels of work diversity. Nowadays, organizations operate in an increasingly globalized environment and must manage dissimilar employee populations (i.e. baby boomers, generation X and Y), markets (i.e. domestic, regional and global markets), cultures (i.e. more than one cultures working together) and modes of work (i.e. part-time, contract workers, full-time, etc.) (Beechler & Woodward, 2009). These dissimilarities make attracting and retaining talent more difficult for companies since more complex strategies need to be implemented. For example, three or four different generations working together requires different strategies for motivating and satisfying each of the generation's needs. While baby boomers might want more economic rewards for the hard work, younger generations such as the generation Y might want more flexible schedules, more time off and the option of working remotely. Therefore, companies need to be more sensitive about the dissimilarities in order to implement strategies that allows them to be more efficient in today's complex environment.

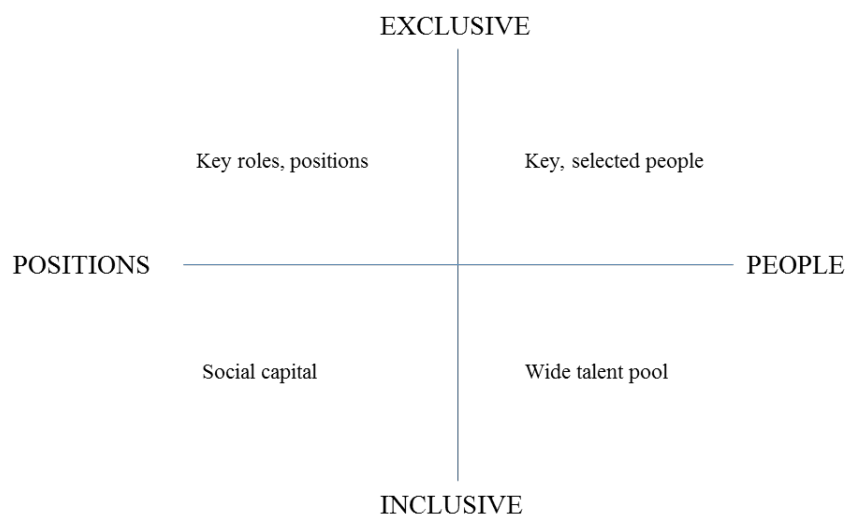
As a result, these factors have affected the global quantity and quality of talent making more difficult for organizations to fulfill their current and future talent needs. Therefore,

different talent management approaches have been launched in order to face these challenges.

2.3.2 Perspectives on TM

As it was mentioned previously, scholars describe four streams regarding how TM is defined in different ways in the literature. The definition depends generally on the organization's context, perception of talent and implementation of talent strategy. Iles;Chau, and Preece have proposed a four quadrant model for contrasting the different perspectives of TM in the figure below. The x-axis shows the focus organizational positions versus the focus on the people. The y-axis shows the focus exclusive versus inclusive. The combination of these two axes creates four quadrants which helps to understand the perspectives in TM. The four quadrants are: exclusive-people, exclusive-position, inclusive-people and social capital.

Figure 11 Perspectives on talent management (Iles, et al., 2010a)



Exclusive-people

This perspective is based on the segmentation of the workforce by their level of talent and contribution to the organization (Morton, et al., 2005). In addition, this perspective encourages investing more resources to the employee segment, top performers or top potentials, which are mostly the ones that generate the most value for the organization (Tansley, 2011). One example is GE's segmentation of its employees as A (top 10-20%), B (middle 70%) and C (the lowest 10-20%) (Iles, et al., 2010a). Basically, GE invests most of its resources to the A category. Moreover, this perspective suggests creating different employee value propositions for each the employee segments in order to target the

segment's needs. It is important to mention that this perspective does not encourages neglecting or forgetting about the other employees (Walker, 2002)

Exclusive-positions

This perspective encourages the identification of key positions of the organization and filling them up with top performers or potentials. Also, it is important to efficiently match each key position to each top performer or potential in order to get the best results. Moreover, Huselid; Beatty and Becker suggest a portfolio approach in which the strategic positions are filled with A players while supporting positions are filled with B players. Positions that do not add value to the organization and C players should be outsourced or eliminated (2005).

Inclusive-people

In this perspective, all the employees are seen as potential talents that are capable of creating great value for the organization. However, the important task is to manage all the employees to deliver high performance. Buckingham and Vosburgh argue that is the HR's challenge to help all the employees to increase their performance by developing their talents. The goal is to transform these talents into lasting performance for the organization (2001)

Social capital

This perspective encourages organizations to develop talent internally and retaining the stars that emerge, as company-specific factors impact the stars' success. These organizational factors are the resources and capabilities, systems and processes, leadership, internal networks, training and team membership. In other words, this perspective argues that high performance is related to the organizational context. This is based on the fact that often A players or stars underperform when they change organizational context (Iles, 2008; Gallardo-Gallardo, et al., 2013).

2.3.4 Criticism of TM

After reviewing what has been said about TM, it is important to go over the main criticisms that this management technique has received. Considerable amount of scholars agree that one of the biggest criticism of TM is that the TM literature is fairly specific about why talent management matters but is it is less specific on what TM is (Huang & Tansley, 2012; Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Iles, et al., 2010b). Moreover, the TM critics do not stop at the ambiguous definitions of talent and TM. There are claims that TM does not

provide anything new and that is just a new way to rebrand HRM. Also, the data used in TM literature has been criticized for being based just on anecdotes that really do not show how TM benefits organizations.

In their TM critical review, Lewis and Heckman's highlights that the terms "talent management", "talent strategy", "succession management", and "human resource planning" were often used interchangeably in different TM publications (2006). This point shows that there is an apparent confusion regarding the term TM, its definition and scope. In the same review, the authors suggest that interchanging terms is part of the efforts of TM publishers to highlight the "strategic" importance of a HR function (e.g. recruiting, selection, development, etc.) (2006).

Besides the unclear definition, there is the controversy about whether or not TM provides anything fundamentally new to organizations. In the case of the four TM streams of thought mentioned previously, there is evidence for putting in doubt the TM "contribution". For the first stream which labels TM as a HR rebrand, TM literature argues that traditional HR work (e.g. recruiting, selection, and staffing) can be executed faster with the usage of technology such as software systems or via internet (Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Collings & Mellahi, 2009). This might require that HR practitioners learn new skills for using new technologies. However, this stream, especially the inclusive approach to TM, does not provide any fundamental changes to the principles of good traditional recruiting, selection, and staffing. Therefore, the label of talent management and usage of technology are just elements for rebranding the HR function making it be seen as new and fresh (Iles, et al., 2010b; Chuai, et al., 2008).

The second stream of thought encourages the usage of talent pools to satisfy the current and future talent needs. However, scholars argue that this stream fails to advance the theory or practice of HR since it repeats most of the work already done in succession and workforce planning (Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Chuai, et al., 2008).

In the case of the third stream, the criticism is mostly based on the lack of strategy as well as the methods for classifying the exclusive approaches (e.g. high performers or high potentials) Supporters of this stream argue that having only high performers/potentials in the organization is a rational way to increase performance. However, some other scholars argue that this practice is not very strategic because it ignores the fact that some

organizational roles might just require regular performance (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2005). In many cases, having high performers doing low performer's work reduces their performance since the work might not be challenging enough. In other words, this practice can reduce the employee's effort leading him or her to underperform (Gonzalez-Cruz, et al., 2009). Another criticism of this stream is that it provides little advice in implementing talent reviews and methods for the talent classification that it promotes. Furthermore, this stream seems to ignore the extensive literature related to employee rating systems and performance appraisals errors (Lewis & Heckman, 2006).

The criticism of the fourth stream is based mainly on the fact that it contains mostly conceptual papers. The empirical studies for supporting those conceptual papers are still pending (Collings & Mellahi, 2009). Moreover, the conceptual papers provide little direction on how to identify and to classify key organizational positions, the stream's main focus. There are some general rules of thumbs mentioned in the literature such as 20% of the quality or availability of talent in pivotal positions has the most impact in the organizational success (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2005; Collings & Mellahi, 2009). Nevertheless, there is not concrete advice for implementation, creating lack of information regarding of this TM perspective.

Beyond the specific criticisms of each of the TM streams, there are some other criticisms around TM. Lewis and Heckman's review point out a core problem with TM literature, which is that it is often based on exhortation and anecdote rather than data (2006). In many cases, CEO's argue that organizational success is the result of their talent management system but there is not data to prove it (Iles, et al., 2010b). Without any data, measurement and models, it is impossible to conclude the degree to which organizational results can be attributed to talent, technology, industry, economy in general or any other factor (Lewis & Heckman, 2006). Because of the mentioned criticisms, it is logical to point out that TM seems to be a MF justifying why academics argue that TM is just another management fashion.

Table 4 Summary of TM main criticisms

Summary of the TM main criticisms	
Vague rhetoric	The literature is fairly specific about why talent management matters but it is less specific (i.e. ambiguous definitions) on what TM is. Therefore, there is not a concrete way to define TM.
Lack of empirical data	There are not clear studies that demonstrate exactly how and to

	what extend TM benefits organizations that used it. However, there are plenty anecdotes and success stories about how TM presumably increased organizational performance.
Rebranded HRM	TM and HRM do not seem to be fundamentally different.
Works from others fields of studies	Some of the TM “new ideas” and “practices” are work already done in the fields of succession and workforce planning. Moreover, the ideas TM initiatives such as assessment centers, succession planning and 360 degree feedback, are not new, stemming from 1950s.
Advertised manly by non-scholars	Most of the TM publications are published in practitioner literature rather than academic literature. The vast majority of the authors are consultants, management gurus, and organizational leaders.

2.4 Talent Management in a Management Fashion Context - Framework of reference

As it was mentioned before, the objective of this thesis is to study talent management from a management fashion perspective. This section begins with a review of previous talent management studies from a management fashion perspective. These previous studies already claimed to discovery some management fashion features displayed by talent management. After covering the previous, the management fashion market and management fashion setting process are described.

2.4.1 The Management Fashion of Talent Management

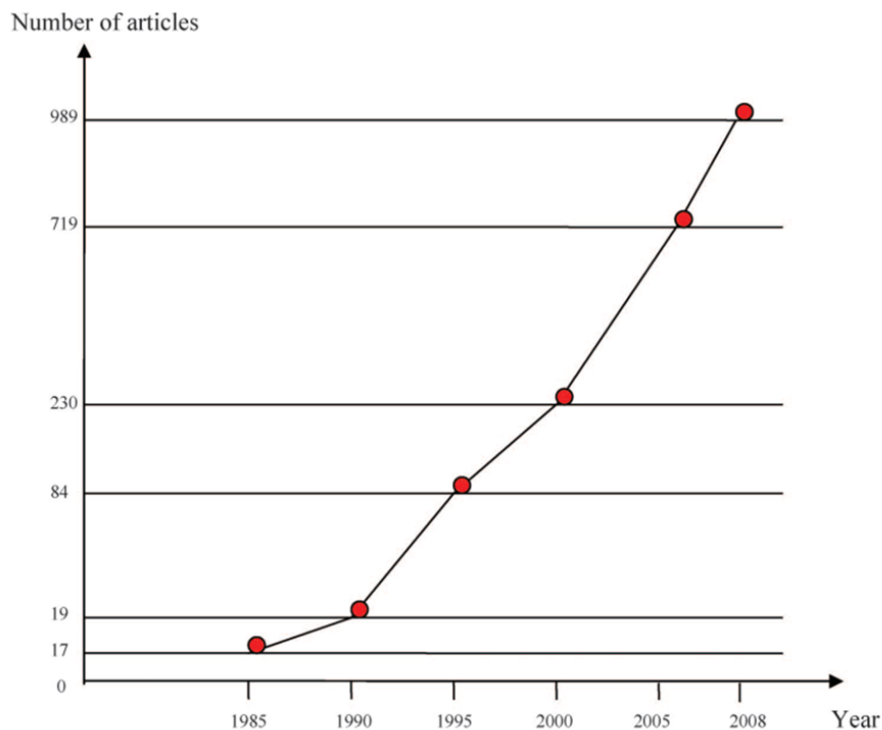
As the TM phenomenon grows, the argument of TM being a MF grows. Scholars such as Iles, Preece, Chuai, Lewis and Heckman have shown through the work that TM fits most of the MF characteristics described in section 2.1.2 (Iles, et al., 2010b; Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Iles, et al., 2010a; Chuai, et al., 2008). As most MFs, TM publications make this management technique seem to be attractive, modern, rational and progressive. The proof is that the majority of the publications describe TM as “innovative”, “efficient”, and “systematic” for ensuring “the talent (i.e. people, skills, attitudes, and mindset) development”, for improving current “organizational performance” and ensuring “sustainable growth” in the future (CIPD, 2007; Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Al Ariss, et al., 2014). Accompanied with the urgency tone, TM publications advertise the idea that organizational performance will increase once firms implement TM initiatives. Therefore, TM appears to be “rational” (e.g. effective means to a valued end) as well as “modern” and “progressive” (e.g. new or improved in relation to older management techniques)

Besides being rational and progressive, TM publications have already shown the bell shaped curve typically associated with MFs. Iles, Preece; and Chuai study shown that the number of TM publications is growing similarly to a MF lifecycle (2010b). *Table 5* shows the growing numbers of TM publications in two known databases. Moreover, *Figure 12* displays part of the bell-shaped curve once the number of TM publications is put in a graph. This graph argues that TM is still in its growing phase as a MF. However, TM publications will reach maturity and decrease since all management fashions are transitory (Iles, et al., 2010b). Nevertheless, more studies need to be performed in order to know what TM's current phase is and to prove the transitory nature of TM empirically.

Table 5 Article count of TM publications between 1985 and 2008 (Iles, et al., 2010b)

Article count of “talent management” between 1985-2008						
Number of articles published during the year						
Source	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2008
Business Source Premier Emerald	17	19	84	230	719	989
Emerald	0	1	73	130	274	361

Figure 12 Graph of number of TM articles in Emerald database in the period 1985-2008 (Iles, et al., 2010b)



In addition, the previous graph suggests that the increment shown in TM publications is accompanied by an increment on numbers of firms' implementing TM initiatives, bandwagon effect. This is shown in the latest PwC's 2014 global survey which shows that

59 percent of the CEOs interviewed mentioned that their companies have already completed or are undergoing the implementation of talent strategy and TM system. Moreover, 22 percent are developing the plans for implementing a talent strategy and management system (PWC, 2014). This means that around 80 percent of the biggest global companies are engaged in this talent management phenomenon. Therefore, it is understood that TM has generated a bandwagon effect that lead to the adoption of TM practices by a considerable number of companies.

Another MF characteristic shown by TM is that “management fashion setters” mainly advertise them. In other words, HR consultants, management consultants and gurus write most of TM publications (i.e. articles, blogs, books, and conferences). According to Dries’ review, out of 7000 TM related publications identified in 2013, only 100 of them were published in academic journals and identified “talent management” as key word (2013). This shows how much more the publications were written by “MF setters”. This argument is also supported by TM reviews of (Iles, et al., 2010b) and (Lewis & Heckman, 2006). Both reviews agreed that the majority of TM publications were published in practitioner media by practitioners. Also, the reviews agreed that most of TM’s appealing rhetoric was based on vague anecdotes lacking sound empirical data (Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Iles, et al., 2010b). In detail, they identified that the TM studies that have been conducted are typically case studies, or survey or interview studies in which HR managers are asked to typify their organization’s talented management practices and their underlying rationale (Dries, 2013). Moreover, some concepts are unclear and the data presented in articles seldom shows the TM benefits for the organizations. Consequently, it can be said that TM also have the MF characteristics of been advertised by MF, vague rhetoric, and lack of empirical data.

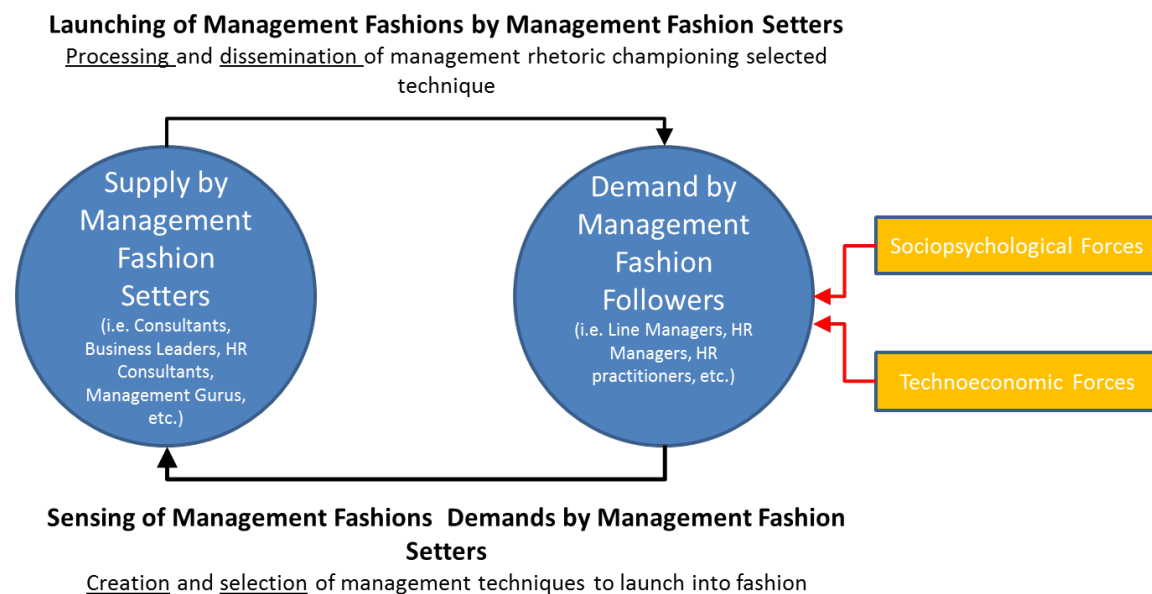
Like many MFs, TM promotes as new, many concepts and practices that have been around for some time already. TM promoters have taken elements from succession planning, 360 degree feedback, workforce planning, and many other disciplines (Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Iles, et al., 2010b). In addition, TM is also accused of being fundamentally the same as HR but it claims to do the same HR job faster than traditional HR. This is why both terms have been used interchangeably and in some cases, TM has been seen as the new label for the HR function (Lewis & Heckman, 2006). For these reasons, TM is considered to be “old wine in new bottles”

As a result, TM displays many management fashion characteristics and this is the main reason why it is considered to be management fashion. Since TM is considered a management fashion, it is valid to assume that it can be studied in the management fashion market framework in order to discover novel and interesting features of talent management.

2.4.2 Management Fashion Market

In general, the management fashion market is where management fashions are traded. The MF setters sense scout demands for management fashions resulting from the effects of the sociopsychological and technoeconomic forces on the management fashion followers (e.g. HR managers, professional, etc.). Then, management fashion setters tailor management fashions to satisfy the MF followers' demands. As defined by Abrahamson, management fashions are the result of supply and demand in a knowledge market (e.g. management fashion market) (1996).

Figure 13 Management Fashion Setting process in Management Fashion Market (Abrahamson, 1996)



2.4.3 Demand for Management Fashions

The demand side of MF is made of the professionals, MF followers, who actually use management techniques in their work. For example, line managers, HR managers, supervisors are some of the professionals who demand management fashions. As previously mentioned, sociopsychological forces make MF followers demand MFs in order to be seen as individualistic/novel, to overcome frustration/despair and to distinguish themselves and their companies from lower reputation managers and firms. Moreover, technoeconomic forces (e.g. new technologies, new legislations, environmental changes,

manager's anxiety, etc.) affect the demand and implementation of certain MFs in order to close the performance gaps. Therefore, the mentioned forces are the drivers for management fashion demands and they are constantly affecting the MF followers.

However, the obvious question is where do MF followers express their frustration, desire and demand for management fashions?. Traditionally, most communications could be assumed to be through interpersonal networks (i.e. formal/informal meetings, personal relationships, etc.). Nowadays, there are many channels where the MF followers can communicate their frustration/despair about current management techniques as well as their desire for new management techniques. These channels are social media (i.e. blogs as HRzone or CIPD, forums, LinkedIn, etc.) and the research (i.e. surveys, workshops, conferences, etc.) conducted by different consulting companies as well as institutions like Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). For example, CIPD organizes different surveys and events every year in order to find out what are the concerns, frustrations and needs of HR professional for improving the HR practices that drive maximum value for both employees and the businesses they work in (CIPD, 2015). Also, consulting companies such as Deloitte, and Pricewaterhouse Cooper conduct their own research (i.e. surveys, industry reports, etc.) in order to uncover the needs of the MF followers. In addition, social media channels and most of the surveys' results are available online and they are easily available to anyone. Therefore, they offer an insight of the MF setters' demands for fashions as well as a chance of the MF followers to share their thoughts.

2.4.4 Supply of Management Fashions

The supply side of the management fashion market is made of the MF setters. In detail, different organizations and individuals act as MF fashion setters, such as top managers, management consultants, HR consultants, business schools, academic gurus, "hero managers", and the business press (Abrahamson, 1996; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). MF setters are actors who dedicate themselves at producing and disseminating management discourses that make a management technique appear fashionable and it legitimates their users (Iles, et al., 2010b). In order to disseminate MFs and to create the bandwagon effect, the MF setters often use publications in mass media for promoting certain management technique. Abrahamson and Fairchild have identified three types of publications according to whether they provide references to previous research or studies (1999).

The first type of publications are academic journals (e.g. Academy of Management Review) in which published articles on the topic (e.g. management, marketing, etc.) are written by academics. Also, they are characterized by always including references and they undergo strict validation processes (e.g. referees validation) prior publications. The second type is the semi-academic journals (e.g. Harvard business review) which sometimes contain references. This type of publications still has to undergo an strict validation process prior publication but they are not as strict as the ones used for academic journals. The third and last type of publications is popular-press publications (e.g. Business week). This type of publications seldom or never contain any type of references and most validation prior publishing does not focus on the sound validity of the arguments or/and studies. Also, these publications might include a wide variety of topics. For example, Businessweek magazine has articles from politics, technology, design, and management (Businessweek, 2015). Nevertheless, MF setters such as consultants and management gurus often choose popular media and/or semi-academic journals for disseminating their rhetoric about certain management technique (Lawyer III, 2007). These two types of publications reach a wider audience since they are written in non-academic language using catching phrases/concepts such as “War of Talent”, “TQM”, and “Sigma Six”. Therefore, they are more attractive and easier to read for the managers and practitioners.

Table 6 Types of publications by MF setters (Abrahamson & Fairchild, 1999)

Types of publications by MF setters		
Type	Description	Example
Academic Journals	Articles with references on the topic by academics.	Academy of Management Review and Journal of International Business Studies
Semi-Academic Journals	Articles that sometimes include references.	Harvard Business Review McKenzie Quarterly
Popular Press	Publications that seldom or never contain any type of references	Businessweek The Economist

Even though the academic and practitioner literature are included in the supply side of the management fashion market, it is important to make a distinction between them. In detail, the practitioner literature (semi-academic journals and popular media) is used more commonly than academic literature (academic journals) (Abrahamson, 1996; Abrahamson

& Fairchild, 1999; Iles, et al., 2010b; Scarbrough, et al., 2005; Spell, 2001). However, the academic literature scores high on rigor (i.e. complex methods and analysis) and relevance for the theory (i.e. more abstract) but too often score poorly on informing or improving the practice (Lawyer III, 2007).

Some argue that academics are not directly rewarded for writing articles and conducting research that improve the practices directly but instead, they are more often rewarded for contributing to the theory and for publishing in “A journals”. The suspicion seems to be that if an academy article can be translated into material for practitioner journals and it has clear implications for the practice, then it may not be good academic research (Lawyer III, 2007). This is one of the reasons why MF followers often turn to practitioner literature. It is easier for them to translate into the practice. In addition, academic literature has a longer writing process which often results in articles about certain technique being published after the technique has been around for a while (Abrahamson, 1996; Spell, 2001; Scarbrough, et al., 2005). This is why academia and universities are often the last ones to publish about popular techniques. In contrast, the practitioner literature scores low in rigor, high on attractiveness (i.e. current issues and catchy concepts), and it gets published faster, making it the favorite choice of MF setters for disseminating their rhetoric.

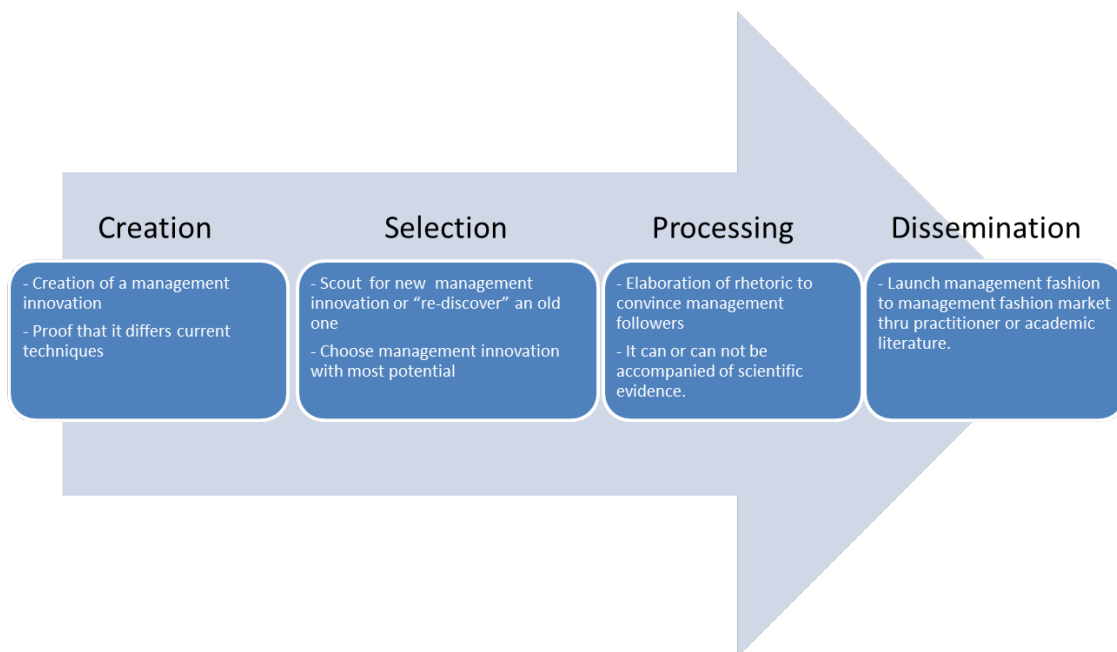
As a result, the empirical part of this thesis studies the practitioner literature about talent management. Specifically, blog posts of HR professionals were selected. In recent years, blogs have become very popular among MF setters and MF followers. MF setters publish their rhetoric there allowing the interaction and discussion with MF followers. In addition, they have a relative high amount of information per post potentially containing deep insight, tend to encourage unusual amount of honesty and they are excellent for spotting trends that can be tracked over time. (Barger & Labrecque, 2013; Puri, 2007). Nevertheless, the management fashion publications are the result of the supply side of the management fashion market.

2.4.5 Management Fashion Setting Process

As previously mentioned, the theory of management fashion comes from the theory of production of culture. The former argues that entire industries often stand between the creators of cultural innovation and the masses that use these innovations if they become fashionable (Hirsch, 1972). In other words, the mentioned industries produce/sell the cultural fashions that the masses may or may not consume. For producing and selling cultural innovations, DiMaggio & Hirsch described a four-fold process used in

organizations in the publishing, record, and motion picture industries that mediate between, on one hand, writers, musicians, or actors, and on the other hand, consumers of literacy, musical, or cinematographic mass fashions.(1976). First, cultural innovations are produced in small business-show, musical or literacy groups/circles. Second, talent scouts from fashion setting organizations access these circles to see these innovations(i.e. manuscripts, scores, scripts, etc.) and select few that are believed to be tomorrow’s biggest innovation. Thirdly, fashion setters process (i.e. manuscripts are rewritten) these innovations with an eye to the market to which they are targeted. Fourth, the processed innovations are advertised and sometimes fashion setters attempt to co-opt mass-media gatekeepers (i.e. critics, editors, etc.) in order to bring these innovations to the public’s attention. Based on this, Abrahamson proposed a four-step process to understand how MF setters create a new management fashion for to the management fashion followers.

Figure 14 Management fashion setting process (Abrahamson, 1996)



Creation. Management innovations are supposed to be a significant departure from the state of the art in management at the time of their first appeared (Abrahamson, 1996; Birkinshaw & Hamel, 2008). In detail, it means that innovations do not need to be an improvement over existing practices, they just have to be significantly different. In some cases, these innovations might be an improvement but sometimes they are not. However, the MFs are the ones who create the “collective beliefs” that certain management innovation are different from the state of the art and that they are also an improvement over the existing practices(in some cases, this is inaccurate) .

Management innovations usually are created in two places according to Abrahamson (1996). Some management innovations are created in firms by managers/consultants for solving a specific issue or performance gap (Abrahamson, 1996; Birkinshaw & Hamel, 2008). Some other management innovations are created in consulting companies by consultants using their own research and their management knowledge. For example, BCG have been credited for the creation of the BCG matrix. Alternatively, consultants sometimes take previous management techniques and rename them as new (i.e. pay for performance and management by objectives were the same technique but with different names). In other words, they created the “old wine in new bottle” phenomenon.

Selection. In this stage, MF setters choose what management innovations have the biggest potential for becoming the next management fashion. There are two selection processes than MF setters can use depending on where the management innovation was created (Abrahamson, 1996). The first process consists in scouting management innovations that have been created and implemented in firms. Once they have been scouted, MF setters contact the managers/consultants, the creators, in order to take the management innovation to the processing stage. The second selection process consists in selecting already existing techniques that have been forgotten or re-discovered. In this case, MF setters use what they know about MF follower’s demand as the criteria for selecting the next management fashion (Abrahamson, 1996) However, it is possible that they want to influence the demand for fashion by launching a MF that fits their own interests.

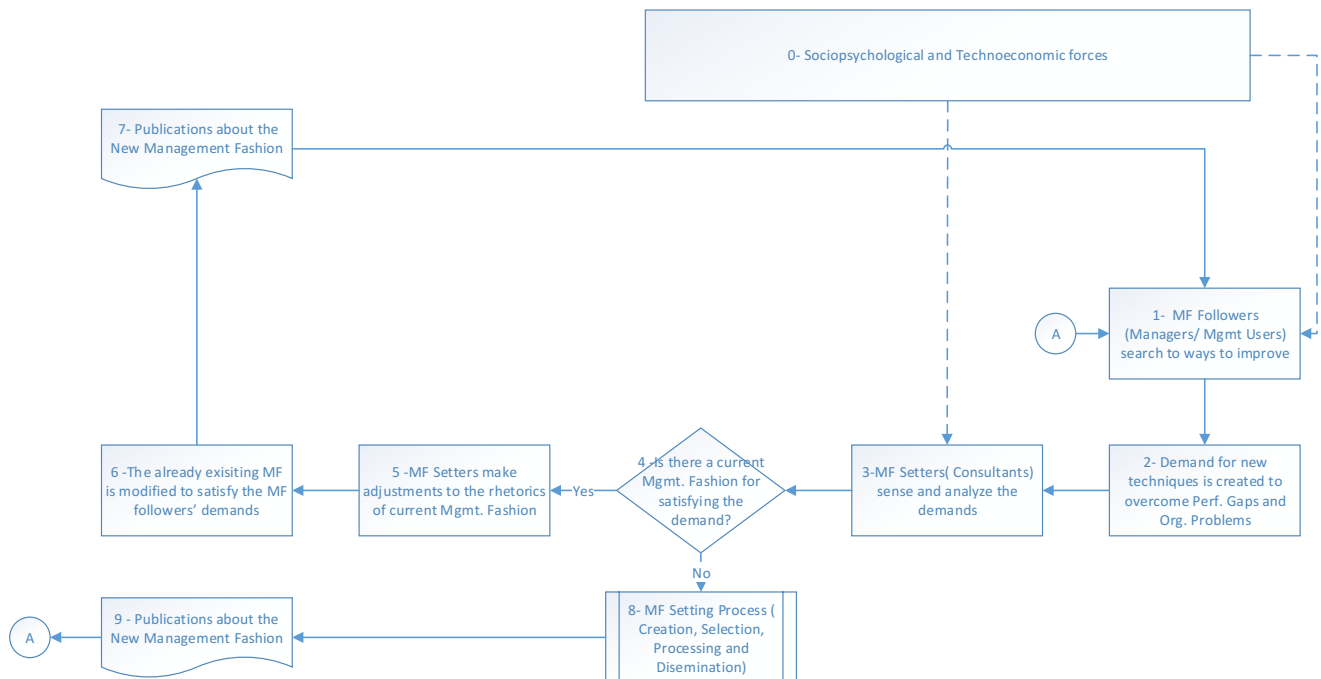
Processing. This stage involves the elaboration of a rhetoric that can convince fashion followers that a management technique is both rational and at the forefront of management processes (Abrahamson, 1996). Certain rhetoric clearly indicates how a management technique constitutes an innovation, or reveals the history of successes and failures of management innovation that is being brought back into fashion. In addition, the rhetoric discloses scientific evidence, indicating that the management technique provides an improvement over techniques currently in use, as judged by carefully articulated criteria. However, there are rhetorics that provide no careful evidence that techniques constitute improvements. This is stage is when a management technique gets packaged to be the next biggest management fashion. If MF setters were bakers, this stage is where the baker works its magic with the frosting to make the cake look more attractive and tastier in the consumers’ eyes.

Dissemination. This is the stage where the publications about certain management technique are launched into the management fashion market. As previously mentioned, there are two types of literature, practitioner and academic. The practitioner literature is more popular than the academic one. In addition, there is the assumption that practitioner literature leads the dissemination stage and shapes the academic literature's rhetoric (Barley, et al., 1988).

2.5.6 Framework for studying the TM phenomenon

The researcher has expanded Abrahamson's framework for a better understanding of the talent management in the management fashion market. The framework has been drawn using a flow chart technique to show the researcher's perceived sequence of actions inside the management fashion market. This technique is characterized for its strong communication ability and it is often used for describing models for learning and for decision support to process development/design (Aguilar-Savén, 2004). It is important to mention that actions in the MF market are constantly repeating like an iterative process.

Figure 15 Adapted view of the Management Fashion Market and MF setting process (Abrahamson, 1996)



This framework is used during the discussion chapter to combine the empirical results of the perceptions of HR professionals of talent management and the literature review

chapter. The next chapter includes the details regarding the research strategy, the data collection and the explanation of the analysis of this study.

3. METHODOLOGY

This thesis uses an innovative research design in which data is collected from the blogs of a major online community in the UK. By participating in the online discussions and blogging, the community's members communicate their thoughts, opinions and suggestions about HR-related topics such as talent and talent management. In other words, these professionals are able to communicate the reality of their profession in terms of personal perceptions. As a result, the professionals' perceptions in the blogs have a relative high amount of information per post potentially containing deep insight, tend to encourage unusual amount of honesty and they are excellent for spotting trends that can be tracked over time. (Barger & Labrecque, 2013; Puri, 2007). Even though the data's nature is qualitative presented in the form of text, the analysis was conducted based on a mixed methodology in which qualitative data is analyzed following a quantitative algorithm of Leximancer software providing both qualitative and quantitative insights into the data. Due to the time span and the research approach, the researcher was able to conduct a longitudinal analysis comparing the perceptions, experiences, suggestions and opinions of professionals across the 2009 - 2014 period.

3.1 Research Approach

In general, research approaches can be associated with either deductive or inductive aspects of inquiry (Saunders, et al., 2007). The deductive approach (top-down) develops the hypothesis or hypotheses upon a pre-existing theory and then formulates the research approach to test it against the observations (Silverman, 2013; Saunders, et al., 2007). In contrast, the inductive approach (bottom-up) does not require testing hypothesis; it starts with observations from the data and patterns are looked for in order to generate new theories (Bryman & Bell, 2013). However, Peirce's writings divided research into three mutually exclusive categories: deductive, inductive and abductive. Deductive proves that something *must be*; induction shows that something *actually* is operative; abduction merely suggests that something *may be* (Walton, 2005). In detail, abductive reasoning goes from data observation (e.g. bottom-up) to a theory, which accounts for the observation, ideally seeking to find the simplest and most likely explanation (Walton, 2005; Sober, 2013). Also, by having data observation as the starting point, ground theory based on abductive reasoning enables the researcher to generate systematically a substantive theory grounded

in empirical data, which its goal is to discover a theory that has grab, fit the data, and work in the real world (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This means that a theory can be generated through ongoing iteration from different data sources, including theory text.

The approach of this study is abductive reasoning and ground theory. It starts with the data observation leading to the search for patterns, from which a theory is used to explain a particular phenomenon as well as to deepen its understanding. The study started with data and the literature about talent management. From the observation of the data, changes in the definitions of TM and talent were noticed in the 2009-2014 period. Similar inconsistencies were also noticed in the TM literature. Moreover, after reviewing different available theories that could explain the observed phenomenon, the researcher recognized that Abrahamson's management fashion market could offer an explanation. Therefore, this thesis analyses the professionals' perceptions of TM phenomenon through Abrahamson's management fashion market aiming to develop further, what it is known about the TM. Ultimately, the mixed methodology used on the qualitative data of the blogs in the online community supports the abductive reasoning and ground theory.

According to Saunders, the purpose of the research is often classified into three categories: exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory. Nevertheless, it is very common that research studies serve more than one purpose (2007). This thesis is designed as mainly descriptive blog research with exploratory and explanatory elements. Moreover, this thesis studies the HR professionals' perceptions of talent management. This includes describing the TM practices (descriptive element), discovering the management fashion features of TM (exploratory elements) and maybe describing some management fashion mechanisms that could offer an explanation to better understand the TM phenomenon (explanatory elements).

3.2 Research Design

As mentioned in earlier chapters, there are limited amount of studies of TM from a MF perspective. On one hand, most recent studies have focused on determining if TM is a management fashion according to the Abrahamson's definition (Chuai, et al., 2008; Iles, et al., 2010a; Iles, et al., 2010b). These empirical studies include mostly Print Media Indicators (PMI), mainly used in the MF literature by Abrahamson, (Scarborough, et al., 2005; Iles, et al., 2010b) and interviews with firms' personnel (Chuai, et al., 2008) to a lesser extent. The PMI studies are mainly limited to study the content of publication's abstracts and the resulting popularity curves (rise and fall) from the number of articles

published related to a specific management technique (e.g. TM, Spaghetti organization, Total Quality Management, etc.) during a certain period of time. On the other hand, this study employs a unique and innovative research method using real time data from online HR blogs. This method of using online blogs is anticipated to provide new sources of information for exploring what HR professionals are saying about TM and for discovering management fashions features of talent management.

Moreover, utilizing blogs rather than traditional research techniques or traditional academic publications can offer major benefits to the research design and unveil TM/MF features that could not be identified otherwise. First of all, Hookway argues that using blogs makes it possible to collect large amounts of global data in an easily and affordable way (2008). The main reason is that blogs are publically available and often free. Secondly, blogger profiles offer interesting additional information to the blog research such as job position, company, and industry (Hookway, 2008). Therefore, there is the opportunity for selecting the most adequate blog entries according to the research objective. Thirdly, blog entries tend to be accumulative, Hookway described as “archived nature”, which allows longitudinal research (2008). This means that blog research makes it possible to explore and analyze data that has been collected over a certain period of time. The mentioned nature is essential for this study since the research questions focus on the over-time evolution of the the TM solutions.

In addition, blog research is considered popular-management press and often fashions(i.e. management fashion) emerge in popular press before academic-management literature (Spell, 2001). Not only fashions emerge in popular press but they may shape the academic press’ rhetoric (Barley, et al., 1988) This means that popular-management press tends to lead the dissemination of progressive-management rhetorics, whereas the academic management press tends to lag. For these reasons, this studies uses blog research.

3.2.1 Research setting

The empirical part of this thesis is made of blogs from a major global online HR community, HRzone.com. As a result, the professional’s opinions, experiences, thoughts, and interactions portrayed in the HRZone community are the basis of this thesis. Throughout the observation and data collection, the researcher remains passive. This means that the researcher did not make any comments or blog posts that could influence the phenomenon.

3.2.2 Unit and level of analysis

The unit of analysis is the major entity that is being analyzed in a study. The “what” or “who” is being studied. According to the four-classification of unit of analysis by Fletcher & Plakoyiannaki, the unit of analysis of this thesis fall under the definition of “temporal unit” (e.g. episode, encounter or an event). Furthermore, HR blogs is the empirical unit of analysis because it is the medium facilitating the observation and data collection. Moreover, the objective of this study aims to describe in detail TM’s characteristics regarding its use, the practices it includes and the firm’s problems it solves from a management fashion perspective by tapping into the perceptions of HR professionals in a major online community.

Since the collected data includes the perceptions of individuals performing people related practices, the empirical focus of the study is at a micro-level. Nevertheless, a multi-level approach is used during the data analysis because the collected data will be used to better understanding the TM phenomenon that affect both micro (e.g. managers, employees, etc.) and macro (e.g. organizations) levels.

3.2.3 Sampling procedures

This thesis uses purposeful sampling technique and criterion sampling. Purposeful sampling is commonly used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas, et al., 2015). Even though there are several different purposeful sampling strategies, criterion sampling appears to be the most adequate to provide rich and in-depth cases related to the research objective of this study (Palinkas, et al., 2015). The authors’ previous knowledge and the literature review around the research topic assisted in setting up the criteria for selection. One of the most striking things about blogs is that they are diverse with complex visual designs and layouts, making it challenging, for researchers, to choose relevant information for their research aims in the endless maze of blogs (Hookway, 2008). Using the research questions as guidance for the empirical part of this thesis, the researcher narrowed down the selection to online blogs specialized on HR related topics in English language and with available historical data for the longitudinal study. Based on the former criteria, the blogs’ reputation and the availability of blogger’s personal information (e.g. job position, company name, etc.), the HRzone community was selected for this study.

HRzone

HRzone.com is the largest and most active independent online community for HR professionals in the UK, with over 80,000 unique users per month, to the researcher knowledge at the time of this study data collection. Subscribers are kept up to date via our website, social channels and email briefings on the latest HR issues (HRZone, 2014). In addition to the topical editorial content, one of HRzone's strengths lies in its highly interactive forum where members can network, debate and share knowledge with fellow HR professionals. Furthermore, HR's professionals are encouraged to contribute to the discussion regarding HR topics and to share the latest insights of the HR community. Regarding blog posts related to TM topics, HRzone accumulates information from 2009 making it the main source of the empirical data.

3.3 Data Collection

In the October 2014- January 2015 period, the researcher collected data for this study. In order to have access to the blog posts and comments in HRzone, registration using the researcher's LinkedIn account was necessary. Once the access to the blog posts was granted, the HRzone web portal and forums were explored for understanding the structure of the HR community. The next step required was the definition of key words for selecting and collecting the blog posts for this study. The key words used were "talent" and "talent management". Thanks to the filter options of HRzone, it was relatively easy to filter all the blog posts using the mentioned keywords in the 2009-2014 year period. In total, 1,236 blog posts/comments were collected.

In order to keep track of the collected blogs, a spreadsheet was created. The spreadsheet included the following information: username, position, company, industry, link, keyword, data, extract, and type of publication (i.e. blog post or comment on a post). Regarding the data collection, the process was the following:

1. Filtering blog posts using the key words: talent and talent management
2. Collecting of all blog posts in .txt files in different folders depending on year (i.e. a blog post/comment from 2010 was saved in the 2010 folder) in order to have the data in longitudinal form. The total collected data was 1,236 blog posts/comments.
3. Capturing of relevant information of each blog post/comment in the spreadsheet

4. Discarding all the blog posts about news, awards, events and conference invitations. The total amount of blog posts/comments disregarded was 125.

3.3.1 Characteristics of the collected data

Most of the members of this online community hold a top management position (e.g. Director- 49%, and CEO- 20%). The third place in the job ranking is consultant/executive with 15% followed by managers with 14%. Moreover, the most of the participants of the community belong to an industry related to the management of people: 36 % human resources and 18% management consulting. Nevertheless, a significant amount members of the community are from industries such as staffing & recruiting(13%) and professional training & coaching (11%) which are often included in the HR field (Lewis & Heckman, 2006). Half of the companies are made of less than 50 employees, 1-10 has 30% and 11-50 has 24%. The third position with regards to company size is in the 50-200 range with 16%. Surprisingly, only 11% of the companies did not have information available in LinkedIn. It is important to mention that the majority of job positions of the members of the HR online community in this study match the job positions of the management fashion setters (e.g. CEO, Director and management consultant) and followers (e.g. managers and executives) described by Abrahamson (1991; 1996; 1999)

Table 7 Characteristic of the data

Job Position of the publisher	%	Industry	%	Size	%
Director of Area	49 %	Human Resources	36 %	1 to 10	30 %
CEO	20 %	Management Consulting	18 %	11 to 50	24 %
Consultants/Executive	15 %	Staffing and Recruiting	13 %	51 to 200	16 %
Managers	12 %	Professional Training & Coaching	11 %	N/a	11 %
Senior position	3 %	Computer Software	7 %	201 to 500	5 %
Coordinators	1 %	Information Technology and Services	4 %	1001 to 5000	5 %
		Marketing and Advertising	4 %	10001 to more	4 %
		Outsourcing/Offshoring	3 %	501 to 1000	3 %
		Online Media	3 %	5001 to 10000	2 %
		Academy	1 %		

3.4 Leximancer

Leximancer is a text mining software that can be used to analyze the content of textual documents collections and to visually display the extracted information in a browser. In general, the information is displayed by means of a conceptual map that provides an overview of the material, representing the main concepts contained within the text and how they are related (Leximancer, 2016). In order to do so, Leximancer does a conceptual and relational analysis on the data to discover the main concepts and how they are related to each other (Campbell, et al., 2011; Leximancer, 2011).

The analysis in Leximancer is done in two sequential parts. The first part is the semantic extraction and its aims are: “(1) to construct classifiers for multiple concepts that can predict whether a small segment of text contains one or more of the concepts, (2) to provide a meaningful name for each concept as a signifier; this is done to support the interpretation and visualization, (3) to allow the concept set to characterize the message conveyed by the text corpus, (4) to allow manual customization of the concept set prior to learning of the representations.” (Smith & Humphreys, 2006, p. 263) The second part is a relational extraction; its aim is to generate the concept map. Along with the concept map, the following statistics are generated: concept count, concept co-occurrence count, relative concept co-occurrence frequency, and a word count within each text segment classified within a concept (Smith & Humphreys, 2006; Leximancer, 2011).

The main output of Leximancer is the concept map, which is seen as “global representation” of the data set that allows the identification of themes, concepts and their relationships (Rooney, 2005). While themes are large colored circles that contain a cluster of dots, these dots represent the concepts that made the “theme” (Campbell, et al., 2011). The importance of the theme is highlighted by the size and the color of circle; the detailed information and theme ranking are displayed in the thematic summary tab: the hot colors such as red and orange are used to indicate the prevalence of a theme in the tap report (Leximancer, 2013). In addition, the size of the theme circles represent the boundaries of the clusters meaning that the overlapping of the themes and concepts appear close together in the text (Campbell, et al., 2011; Leximancer, 2013). In contrast, themes and concept that are not close to each other are weakly related (Rooney, 2005). As a result, the researcher can use the map as a guide for interpreting the text content.

3.5 Data Analysis

In general, the data for this thesis' analysis is from 1,110 blogs posts and comments collected from one online community, HRzone portal, located in the United Kingdom. The computer assisted text analysis software Leximancer –version 4.0 is used for systematically reviewing the collected data. Prior running Leximancer, the researcher read each of the blog posts/comments in order to choose the data for the analysis. Therefore, the researcher deepened its knowledge acquired during the literature review stage. Once the text analysis with Leximancer tool was completed, the researcher read the Leximancer's results (e.g. themes, concepts, statistics, etc.) as well as each of the blog posts based on the results. Therefore, the researcher wrote the *Chapter 4* and *5* based on the Leximancer's results and on the literature review.

In detail, it is important to describe the process followed for analyzing the data in Leximancer as well as the Leximancer's settings used for processing the data. First of all, the data was grouped in 7 clusters with the following distribution:

Table 8 Datasets

Data Set	Number of blog post/comments
Year 2009	59
Year 2010	91
Year 2011	203
Year 2012	218
Year 2013	222
Year 2014	317
All years	1110

Therefore, Leximancer generated a map for each of the clusters. The concept map for “all years” data set was used to identify where each of the years was positioned with the respect to the overall themes and concepts (Cretchley, et al., 2010; Liesch, et al., 2011). The rest of the year maps, from 2009-2014, provided detailed information about the themes and concepts of each year. As a result, it is possible to observe changes over time.

In order to generate the concept maps, there are four stages in Leximancer ; load data, generate concept seeds, generate thesaurus, and run project (Leximancer, 2011). The first stage, load data, is for loading the text files into the tool. The second stage, generate concept seeds, is defined by two main settings groups, texting processing and concept seeds. For the texting processing setting, the default settings, “co-concurrence of sentences

per block = 2” and “prose test threshold² = 1.” were used (Leximancer, 2011). In addition, the option for using folder tags was used in the case of the all years’ data set only. The motive was to have the “years” tags located to the closely related themes and concepts. Regarding the concept seeds settings, the default options of automatically identify concepts (i.e. it allows Leximancer to extract the naturally emergent number of concepts from the data) was selected.

The third stage, generate thesaurus, is subdivided in two, concept seeds and thesaurus settings. The concept seeds are classified in auto concepts (e.g. discovered by Leximancer) and user defined concepts (e.g. defined by the researcher). In the auto concepts, the researcher eliminated the irrelevant concepts such as looking, use/uses, others, and terms. In addition, the researcher merged some of the auto concepts that conveyed the same meaning. Some examples are employee and employees, company and organization, person and people, HR and Human Resources. Regarding user defined concepts, the researcher uploaded talented-related words that were gathered during the literature reviews such as talent attraction, millennials, and more (See appendix A). For the thesaurus settings, the concept generality function was set to 5, 12 is the default, in order to reduce the fuzziness and generality of each concept definition by decreasing the number of words that can be included in each concept (Leximancer, 2011).

The last stage, run project, has three groups of settings; compound concepts, concept coding settings, and project output settings. The compound concepts options allowed the research to define concepts such as talent management, company performance, job experience and many more (see appendix A). Regarding the rest of the settings, concept coding and project output, the researcher used the default values. Then, the analysis was run for all the datasets several times in order to generate stable concepts maps. It is recommended to run a project several times since Leximancer is continuously learning. For example, the first two concept maps of the same project might look very different but the more times the same project is run, the more alike the outcome maps would be. (Leximancer, 2011; Smith & Humphreys, 2006). The concept map setting were left at the default values, visibility of the concepts = 100 % and theme size = 33%. Once all the maps were generated, the researcher conducted the analysis for this thesis.

² The Prose Test feature examines raw text sentences to decide whether they are valid prose from the configured languages. This is achieved by counting the number of stop-words that appear within each sentence. If this number is high, it is likely to be a sentence from a configured language. This option allows you to specify the number of stop-words that are required for the sentence to be further processed.

3.6 Quality of the study

According to Eriksson and Kovalainen, reliability and validity are two classical evaluation criteria of research methods. Reliability refers to how likely the study can be replicated obtaining the same results while validity refers to how well the conclusions are able to explain or to describe what happened (2008). The objective of this section is to show the criteria for ensuring the quality of the research design of this study.

Validity has been divided differently over the years. Nevertheless, Yin describes internal and external validity. Internal validity relates to explanatory research that aims to provide mechanisms, which establishes causal relationships (2003). The nature of this study is descriptive so the internal validity takes the form of describing the research context for the possibility of future theoretical replication to be produced. External validity refers to whether the conclusions of the research study can be generalized. In the case of this thesis, the perceptions of HR professionals regarding talent and TM are used to understand the phenomenon and to extend the understanding of Abrahamson's management fashion market. Therefore, the conclusions are meant to test the applicability of Abrahamson's framework but the conclusions could be tested and generalized to other management fashions. Nevertheless, the study is only limited to TM.

In the case of reliability, this study is based on Leximancer results and the researcher's interpretations based on the Leximancer's results. First, a database has been built in a spreadsheet that contains all the collected blogs and relevant information such as important quotes for anyone to replicate the study. Moreover, the usage of Leximancer also contributes to the reliability of the study since it has been proved that Leximancer has faced validity, stability, reproducibility, correlative validity and functional validity tests (Smith & Humphreys, 2006). In general, this means that the similar results can be replicated if the data of this study is run again in Leximancer.

3.7 Ethical considerations

The usage of new internet tools such as blogs for scientific research has brought some new challenges and predicaments regarding to ethical considerations (Hookway, 2008). Therefore, there have been different attempts to provide ethical guideless for the usage of blogs in scientific research. (Hookway, 2008; Sixsimth & Murray, 2001). The aim of this methodology section is to address some ethical considerations regarding the internet and blog research especially on: privacy issues, anonymity and copyright law.

Defining what private and public entails in online settings is one of the main challenges that need to be considered when conducting blog research. In other words, the main issue is who owns the blogs and what permissions are required to use them. There have been different contradicting opinions about this matter (Waskul & Douglas, 1996). Nevertheless, Hookway argues that blogs that are publically available and accessible; they fall under the public domain. (2008). In the case of this study, blogs were publically available and accessible falling into public domain (since the registration was free of charge). In addition, this study protects the anonymity of the publishers by not using their names or usernames. Only the bloggers' opinions and perceptions were analyzed in Leximancer in order to discover overall themes, concepts, and the relationship between them.

Regarding the copyright law, UK copyright law protects the blogs used in this study since the internet content is automatically protected by it (Hookway, 2008; UK Intellectual Property Office, 2016). In practice, it means that a blog is protected as soon as the blogger publishes it online. Nevertheless, there are some exceptions to the copyright in the UK legislation. "Fair dealing" is a legal term used to establish whether a use of copyright material is lawful or whether it infringes copyright and it includes the following exceptions: research and private study, criticism or review, or news reporting (UK Intellectual Property Office, 2016). This thesis falls under research study, it is non-profit, and it does not affect the original market value of the blogs. Therefore, the usage of the blogs in this thesis falls under the "fair dealing" clause and no UK law is broken.

4. ANALYSIS AND PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

The purpose of this section is to analyze and present the results of the research based on the online community blog posts related to talent and TM. The software Leximancer (version 4.0) produces conceptual maps that show the different themes and concepts present in the blog posts. The data (in our case the concept maps) is going to be examined and analyzed using the literature previously reviewed and it is going to use the framework of reference as a lens for understanding the phenomenon. Even though there are other HR related topics mentioned in the blogs, only the talent management related blog posts were selected for this study. Therefore, this chapter focus only on the talent management related concepts associated to the research objective.

With the purpose of make the analysis section easier to understand, from this section forward the themes have been marked with **bold** format and the concepts with *italics* format. Moreover, it is important to warn the reader that, depending of the period of analysis, different themes and concepts can appear. Some terms can change from themes to concepts and vice versa. They can appear or disappear and even to be theme and concept at the same time (the more reason for the use of coding so the reader can distinguish when the same term is used as a theme or as a concept). Another phenomenon observed is the mobility of concepts to different themes depending on the period of study. More about this phenomenon would be discussed after the analysis.

The organization of the chapter reads as follows. The chapter will start with the introduction of an overall concept map that includes all the blogs from 2009 to 2014 (the whole study period). The intention is to capture the essence of how the talent management discussion evolved overtime. This first concept map provides the “big picture” that includes the most important themes and concepts during the aforementioned period of time allowing to associate certain concepts to certain years. The chapter continues with a yearly analysis resulting in the presentation of six yearly analyses. The corresponding yearly concept map generated by Leximancer guides each yearly analysis. After these analyses, the final section would change the focus to changes on the most relevant themes to illustrate their changes over time with the intention of identifying potential evolving patterns.

4.1 Big Picture

In general, Leximancer identified 11 different themes in the 2009 -2014 period. Each of the distinct years are located closer to different clusters, indicating the discourse changes as well as changes in the significance of certain concepts.

Figure 16 2009 -2014 Concept Map

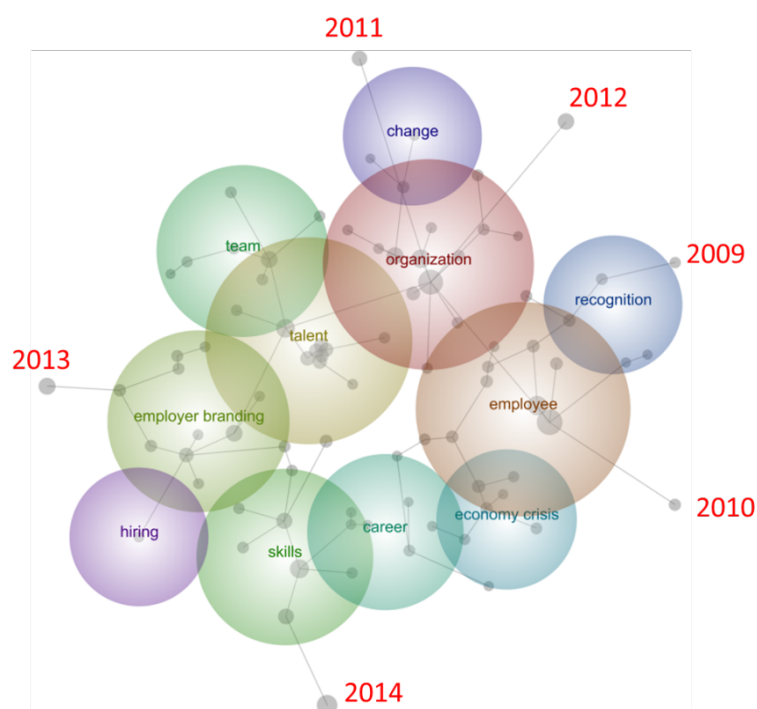


Table 9 2009-2014 Themes and Concepts

Themes	Connectivity	Proximity year	Concepts
Organization	100 %	2012	Organization performance, company culture, organizational needs, leadership, value, strategy, organizational change, culture fit and potentials
Employee	98 %	2010	Employee, employee needs, training, employee engagement, performance, engagement, development, employee value proposition, career development, employee development and report.
Talent	94 %	Cannot be determined	Talent, business, talent acquisition, talent pool, talent shortage, talent supply, talent pipeline, talent identification, key position, succession management and succession planning.
Employer branding	53 %	2013	Employer branding, candidate, recruitment, process, internal recruitment, external recruitment, needs, data, candidate experience, technology and attract.
Skills	52 %	2014	Skills, job, people, role, potential skills, and job experience.
Team	21 %	Cannot be determined	Team, social, strategy, future, social media, and network.
Career	13 %	Cannot be determined	Career, employers, career paths, system, generation Y, generation X, mentoring and baby boomers.
Economic crisis	11 %	Cannot be determined	Economic crisis, learning, benefits, economic situation and coaching.
Recognition	5 %	2009	Recognition, engagement, performers and rewards.
Change	3 %	2011	Change and competence
Hiring	2 %	Cannot be determined	Hiring.

In general, *figure 16* and *table 9* show that the 2009-2012 period was related to the **organization**, **employee** (rather than as person), **recognition** and the **economic crisis** themes. The period 2013-2014 was related to **people**, **skills**, **future career**, and **employer branding** themes. This makes the “big picture” very interesting regarding the changes in themes. Therefore, it is necessary to move to the yearly analysis to uncover the HR professional’s perceptions about talent management and the change in perception overtime.

4.2 Yearly analyses

4.2.1 Year 2009

The results of the textual analysis of the first data set ,“Year 2009”, shows that **organization**, **talent**, **skills** and **recovery** were the dominant themes with connectivity of 100%, 72%, 35% and 20% respectively. Before elaborating in each of the themes, it is important to mention how the analysis is going to proceed. First of all, the fourth most relevant themes and their concepts are analyzed. Secondly, the themes such as **value**, **recognition** and **organizational change** which are related just to the **organization** theme are discussed. Thirdly, the themes related to **skills** theme which are **job experience**, **mentoring** and **candidate experience**, are examined. The rest of the themes such as **technology**, **people**, and **performers** are scrutinized independently.

Figure 17 Year 2009 Themes

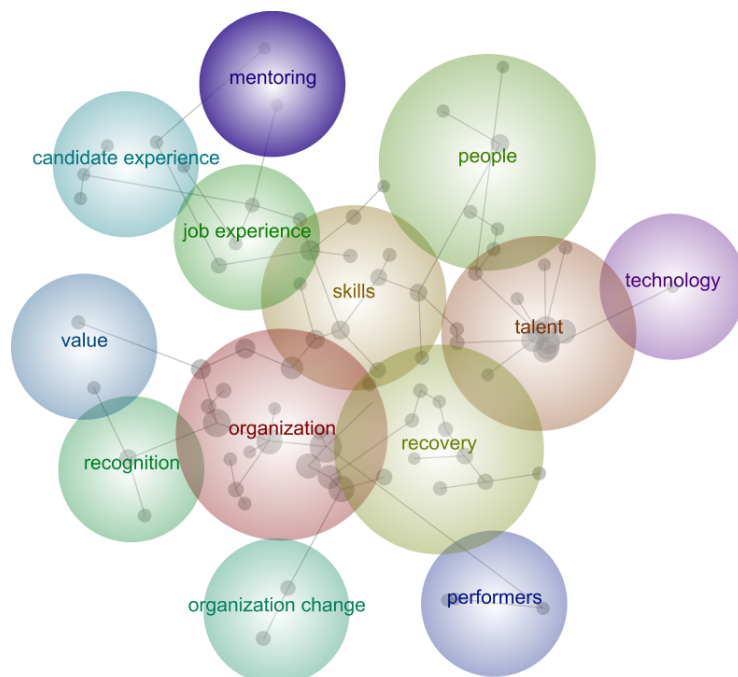


Table 10 2009 Themes and Concepts

Themes	Connectivity	Concepts
Organization	100%	Organization, Emp. needs, organizational performance, employee, company needs, company culture, employee engagement, employee development, employee value proposition, strategic, candidate needs, success, team, process, and baby boomers.
Talent	72%	Talent, talent pool, talent pipeline, talent attraction, talent supply, talent shortage, talent identification, social media, leaders, social, internal recruiting, human, networks, succession planning, and attract.
Skills	35%	Skills, engagement, job, employer branding, business, key positions, potential skills, report, managers, benefits, and system.
Recovery	20%	Recovery, performance, economic crisis, succession management, culture fit, culture, economic situation, strategy, leadership, corporate, and hiring
People	08%	People, external recruitment, recruitment, employers, potentials, and coaching
Job Experience	07%	Job experience, career development, development, and training
Recognition	05%	Recognition, and future
Organization Change	04%	Organization change, and change
Candidate Experience	03%	Candidate experience, career path, career, learning, and role
Value	02%	Value, and rewards
Performers	02%	Performers, generation X, and generation Y
Mentoring	00%	Mentoring, and competence
Technology	00%	Technology

The four most relevant themes: Organization, Talent, Skills, and Recovery

The most influential concepts in **organization** were the *success, organization, company needs, organizational performance, and company culture*. As shown in figure 16, these concepts were overlapping with the **recovery** demonstrating a significant relationships between the themes. However, this issue and the rest of the concepts in the organization theme are discussed later on. Therefore, the four dominant themes (i.e. **organization, talent, skills, and recovery**) seem a good starting point to understand the MF fashion market in 2009. A justifying reason for the overlap of these themes is that such overlap coincides with the manager's concerns and with the talent management solutions offered to address those concerns.

It seems that manager's biggest concern was the negative impact of the 2008 economic crisis. According to HR professionals, the economic crisis affected the organizations' finances, workforce and organizational performance. As soon as the financial stability of the organization was jeopardized, the reduction of organizational expenses started. This included a decrement in number of employees (i.e. laid offs, elimination of talent attraction efforts, which created talent shortages), elimination of employee benefits/rewards, freezes in salary, and an increment in the workload for those who were lucky enough to stay employed. As a consequence, the levels of motivation, engagement, trust, productivity and loyalty of the workforce decreased reducing the overall organizational performance. This is reflected in the statements below:

“...The recession and resulting actions by companies are negatively impacting employee morale: 70% of employees indicated that layoffs and the reduction or elimination of programs and benefits will have a negative short- or long-term impact on morale, 55% of employees said these cuts will impact their productivity levels now and in the future, 89% of HR managers agreed that employee morale is being impacted, 80% of HR managers said productivity will take a hit in the short or long-term. (08.06.2009, SVP Global Strategy)

This shows the managers' concern regarding the well-being of their workforces and how it negatively affected their productivity. In addition, it confirms that HR managers were the ones expected to deal and solve the mentioned issues creating extra pressure on them:

“To this end, HR has a tough job ensuring the top talent do not get up and leave, and that morale, trust, engagement, and productivity do not decline during this tough times and after a number of job losses have been made” (12.06.2009, HR consultant)

However, the concepts *success*, *organization*, *company needs*, *organizational performance*, *company culture*, *performance* and *strategy* were located at the interface of **organization** and **recovery** themes. This overlap illustrates that mentioned concepts were generally perceived as key for organizational survival. Moreover, the central concepts of the recovery themes are *cultural fit*, and *culture*, implying that having employees that fit the organizational culture were necessary for the company during the economic recovery. Also, *hiring* and *succession management* were concepts included in the **recovery** since the discussions highlighted the importance for companies to be ready for the future challenges of the economic recovery (i.e., cost of hiring/training and replacing the employees that leave) as it seen here:

“As recovery does begin to take hold or is more clearly on its way there are issues both for talent retention and for recruitment [hiring]” (22.09.2009, Blog editor)

“Rehiring costs: when the economy goes up, you [firms] will face the costs and delays of training new employees [the ones that were lay-offs or to replace the ones the left at the first sign of economic recovery]” (22.05.2009, SVP Global Strategy)

As these were seen as the future challenges, the concept *attraction* of employees/talent emerged as the link between the **recovery** and **talent** themes. The discussion was centered on the importance of talent and talent management in motivating employees to be more productive and to stay in their companies. In other words, companies saw their employees are their main resource for boosting organizational performance making talent and talent management a priority. Statements like the following supported this:

“where changes to HR and the company critically converge – prioritization of talent and talent management ”(03.04.2009, SVP Global Strategy)

The previous statement highlighted companies converged talent and talent management for dealing with the challenges generated by the economic crisis as well as challenges that could rise from a potential economic recovery. The **talent** theme was made of different concepts such talent practices, social media tools, and topics related to the war for talent (e.g. talent shortage and talent supply). Due to the economic crisis, companies were suffering from talent shortage since many skilled workers were forced to leave and some others would leave as soon as the recovery starts. However, the *social media* concept made of Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter started to emerge as part of the talent management tools:

“The implementation of social networks within the context of HR and Talent Management seems to be something of a hot topic in recent weeks. Furthermore, established and well populated social networks such as LinkedIn and Facebook have already shown themselves as robust and effective recruitment solutions. Today it emerged that Japanese bank Nomura, which acquired substantial chunks of Lehman Brothers after its collapse in 2008, had used Facebook to identify and recruit up to 60% of Lehman’s graduate trainees” (15.09.2009, Technology Correspondent)

As shown in the statement, many companies considered social networks as useful tools for attracting talent. However, it seems that firms were still deciding on what approach to use in their social network strategy, mainstream network (i.e. Facebook) or niche networks (i.e. HiveLive³). Social media tools were also related to *engagement* and *employer branding* as it is shown in the following statement:

“The usage of social networks help organizations ensure they retain their key talent through greater engagement and [employer] brand development within the organization, he also identified the need to take advantage of sites like Facebook and LinkedIn for recruitment.” (15.09.2009, Technology Correspondent)

The statement also supported the idea that employer branding⁴ influenced and helped in the retaining talent making complementary to talent management. Also, *employee value proposition* was referred as key component for developing the desired employer brand. As it was point out by a HR consultant:

³ HiveLive is a B2B social networking application provider for companies to build communities with their customers, employees, or partners.

⁴ Employer brand is the term commonly used to describe an organization's reputation as an employer, as opposed to its more general corporate brand reputation. The term was first used in the early 1990s, and has since become widely adopted by the global management community

“Unlike your product or service brand, employees experience your employer brand your Employee Value Proposition (EVP) unmediated, firsthand and for a large proportion of their week. It is not an occasional purchases, it is a big part of their life” (24.11.2009, Blog editor)

In addition, the **skills** encompassed concepts such as *job, skills, potential skills, business, key positions* and *managers*. The relation among these concepts was that companies needed people with the current skills to perform their jobs, especially those in *key positions*, in order to continue in business during the recession. Managers played an important role in identifying the right skills and key positions. As one editor mentioned:

“It is the managers’ job to ensure employees are the best they can be” (12.11.2009, Editor)

However, little attention was paid to *potential skills* making a more popular version of talent management the one that focus on *current skills*. Moreover, *benefits, systems* and *engagement* refer to the idea of companies using some kind of benefits system (e.g. non-monetary incentives such as meaningful job design or growth opportunities) to motivate the employees. Ultimately, increasing the engagement in companies was one of the companies’ goals to boost the performance of their employees’ skills as it was mentioned by Senior VP:

“Full engagement represents an alignment of maximum job satisfaction (I like my work and do it well) with my maximum job contribution (I help achieve the goals of my organization)” (28.08.2009 SVP Global Strategy)

Engagement related concepts such as *employee value proposition, employee engagement* and *employee development* were part of the **organization** linking it to the **skills**. In addition, the **organization** theme included other concepts such as *employee needs, employee, strategic, candidate needs, team, process, and baby boomers* located right of the at the center of the theme. In other words, mainly employee related concepts were the ones representing the **organization** theme meaning employees were seen as essential for the organization to function as mentioned by a Senior VP:

“Companies like to promote the idea that employees are their biggest competitive advantage” (03.04.2009, SVP Global Strategy)

Value, Recognition, and Organizational change and their relationship with employees

The **recognition** theme included the *recognition* and *future* concepts while the **value** included the *value* and *rewards* concepts. All of these mentioned concepts were related directly to the *employee needs* and *employee value proposition* concepts in the themes. As employees were seen as a valuable resource for the firms, the discussions suggested

recognition/reward programs were the solutions to target employee needs and to create value for them. Non-monetary rewards were constantly mentioned:

“During these tough economic times when financial perks are being cut from budgets, some employers are turning to recognition as a way in which to keep employees happy. Recognition is a low-cost way of getting that return. You’re filling a gap and boosting their feelings toward the company. Over the past three years, we have seen recognition grow as an important tool in HR, and in the past months, we have seen the rate increase even more” (12.02.2009, SVP Global Strategy)

The shift of recognizing employees’ value and implementing recognition/rewards systems was also part of the discussion in the **organization change**. The discussion pointed out that the economy situation required many organizational changes in order to improve organizational performance. However, they highlighted that employees and their engagement levels were a key element for successfully implementing the required changes. As it was mentioned by one VP:

“Highly engaged workers tend to be more supportive of organizational change initiatives and resilient in the face of change.” (23.03.2009, SVP Global Strategy)

Organizational perspective of Job Experience, Mentoring, and Candidate Experience

It is important to highlight the overlapping between **skills** and **job experience** themes since both were seen as attributes that could increase or decrease the value of an employee for the company. As companies find *current skills* more valuable than potential skills, current *job experience* becomes more important reducing the attention to *development* and *training*. Consequently, the expenses in the *development* and training were the first ones to be cut as it was mentioned in the following statement:

Since investments in talent intangibles are expensed rather than capitalized, managers may try to raise short-term earnings by cutting discretionary expenditures on people development (03.04.2009, SVP Global Strategy).

Regardless of the apparent reduction of development and training programs, *mentoring* and *competence* were also found in the discussion. Mentoring was regarded as a key activity for developing employees’ skills and improving career development as a Director pointed it out:

“The skills required for sustainable business are in short supply. We will see a return to experiential learning through mentoring” (04.11.2009, Director)

The *mentoring* concept also contributed to **candidate experience** theme by influencing the design of career paths for attracting and developing talent. In addition, this theme included the concepts of *candidate experience, career path, career, learning, and role*. As previously mentioned, companies were worried about the possible talent shortage during the tentative economic recovery forecasted for 2010. Therefore, improving the overall candidate experience during the recruitment process was considered important since it was seen as an effective way to promote and to encourage candidates to apply. In addition, HR blog editors suggested that highlighting career paths, well-described roles and learning opportunities were necessary to win the war on talent:

“In recruitment –It’s an advert: you’re selling your organization and the experience of working for it. Most of us can assume we need to be ‘dynamic, flexible, self-motivating individuals’ (and so – interminably and unhelpfully – on). We want to know what the job entails [detailed description of the role], what the culture is like [learning atmosphere] and the opportunity it can offer us [future career opportunities- career path]. Get your EVP and your recruitment processes wrong, and you either lose great applicants, drown in mediocre or inappropriate ones – or both. (24.11.2009; HR blog Editor)”

Other themes: People, Performers and Technology

The main idea in **people** theme was the perception of employees as people, meaning that employers and recruiting must focus on people- not having capable employees but capable people. Nevertheless, a considerable amount of the discussion in this theme was related to potential skills and potential talent rather than on current skills and performers.

The **performers** theme included the concepts *performers, generation X* and *generation Y*. This theme aligned with the idea that current skills were highly needed for making it through the economic recession. This involved keeping employees highly engaged with the company in order to maintain high levels of performance. Also, retaining top performers was regarded as essential for organizational performance. The focus was mainly on generation X and generation Y employees since baby boomers were less likely to change companies so close to the end of their career. The following statement summarizes discussion for this theme:

“Keep your top players engaged in your organization and focused on your priorities and, of course, away from your competitors” (17.03.2009, SVP Global Strategy)

As *generation X* and *generation Y* became a considerable part of the workforce, some of the discussions in the **technology** theme were about the increasing usage of technology by

these generations making technology a key element to consider for attracting and retaining these generations. The following statement is just an example of the discussions:

“CEOs will fight for people on three fronts: 1) Attracting and winning the best and the brightest takes world-class offices and factories, the best internal technology, and truly compelling corporate purpose and values; 2) retaining the best workers takes a great corporate strategy, excellent leadership, and inspiring management; and finally 3) getting productivity from the limited workforce you have again, this”.(23.07.2009, SVP Global Strategy)

Summary

Talent management was considered to play an important role engaging employees with current skills (e.g. performers) for companies to survive the economic crisis as well as to prepare them for retaining those top performers after the recession. Also, there was an emerging believe that employees were the main source of competitive advantage but employees and employee-related expenses were the first ones to be cut during the recession. Nevertheless, employee engagement was highlighted as a key factor for organizational performance while employee recognition emerged as a low-cost alternative to increase employee engagement.

4.2.2 Year 2010

The “Year 2010” data set included the following dominant themes: **talent**, **organization**, **employee**, and **people** with connectivity of 100%, 62%, 44%, and 30% respectively. As shown in *Figure 18*, the theme **business** was at the center of the map and it overlapped with all prominent themes. Therefore, the **business** theme and its overlap with the prominent themes are the starting point of this yearly analysis

Figure 18 Year 2010 Themes

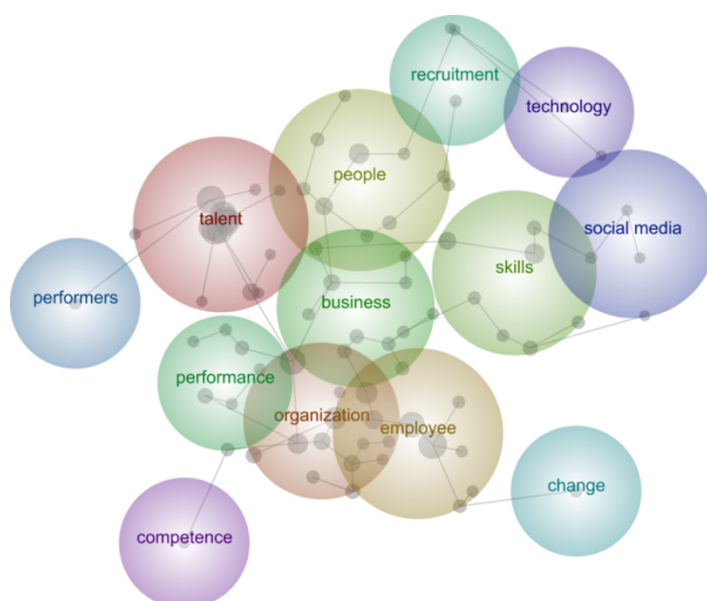


Table 11 2010 Themes and Concepts

Themes	Connectivity	Concepts
Talent	100%	Talent, talent attraction, talent identification, talent pool, talent shortage, talent supply, talent pipeline, succession management, hiring, potentials, attract, system, and mentoring
Organization	62%	Organization, employee engagement, employee development, organizational performance, company culture, company needs, engagement, recognition, strategic, culture, and succession planning
Employee	44%	Employee, emp. needs, employee value proposition, leaders, organization change, success, culture fit, value, reward, and benefits.
People	30%	People, employer branding, potential skills, recovery, economic crisis, role, external recruitment, internal recruiting, future, and economic situation
Skills	27%	Skills, , job, training, job experience, candidate, learning, process, and candidate experience
Business	22%	Business, career development, development, key positions, leadership, human, report, needs, employers, coaching
Performance	13%	Performance, managers, team, strategy, career, career path, data
Recruitment	02%	Recruitment, generation X, and generation Y
Change	01%	Change
Performers	01%	Performers,
Social Media	01%	Social Media, Social, and networks
Technology	00%	Technology and baby boomers
Competence	00%	Competence

Overlap with Business theme: People, organization, talent and employee themes.

Business theme included the concepts of *business, career development, development, key positions, leadership, human, report, needs, employers, and coaching*. In nature, the concepts were very diverse (e.g. career development was often related to HR while leadership was used to refer to top management or to the overall firm). Nevertheless, the discussions in 2010 seemed to agree on engaging employees and aligning the firm's effort to the common goal was important. As it was mentioned by a Founding Director:

“Focus on alignment: make sure people are collaborating, support business goals through their actions, and reflect the values of the organization through their behavior” (30.04.2010, Founding Director)

Moreover, the discussions regarding the *leadership* concept also complemented the importance of aligning the efforts of everyone in the company towards the same direction. One Online Media Editor mentioned the key role that leaders played in this situation as it:

But if leaders stop leading, talent leaves, business suffers. Leaders and employees focus on own interests (20.01.2010, Online media Editor)

In addition, the concepts of *key positions*, *roles* and *coaching* were the overlapping points for the **business** and **people** themes. This overlap showed that having the right people in the firm's key positions and having people with the right skills to their corresponding roles were important for the firm to remain in business. *Coaching* was part of the process of identifying and developing the people's potential skills for specific roles and positions. Also, the **people** theme went from 8% to a 30% connectivity in 2010 following the change in perception (e.g. employees were not seen as merely employees but as people with feelings and lives outside of work) that started in 2009. An example of the blog post regarding this theme was:

You shouldn't expect the new hire to make extreme strides from a business perspective during this time, but you should make them feel welcome as a person so that they can then dig in. (18.12.2010, CEO)

Aligned with this change in perception, the *employer value proposition* was constantly associated with **people** concept/theme, in 2010, while it was usually associated with **organization** concept/theme in the previous year. Moreover, the discussion about *economy crisis* and *recovery* were more often related with the *people* concept than with the concepts of *employee* and *organization*. This also confirmed the increased attention to people during the discussions and the change in perception.

The **talent** theme overlapped with the **people** theme similarly to the overlap between these themes in 2009. Nevertheless, the *talent* theme increased its connectivity score to 100% (from a 72%) making it the most prominent theme in 2010. The concepts included in the theme were *talent*, *talent attraction*, *talent identification*, *talent pool*, *talent shortage*, *talent supply*, *talent pipeline*, *succession management*, *hiring*, *potentials*, *attract*, *system*, and *mentoring*. The theme's overall idea was that talent management increases and helps to maintain employee engagement and to boost organizational performance. An example was what a Founding Director mentioned:

“It is about knowing how to keep the talent fully engaged and as far as possible, hitting peak performance. If you want to retain your brightest talent you have to be able to make sense of the information that you can obtain about what fully engages them”. (20.10.2010, Founding Director)

The previous statement mentioned that retaining talent as well as to have systems that provide insight (i.e. performance and skills data) about the companies’ talent directly affect the organizational performance. The discussion related to *system* concept also included using systems for attracting and identifying talent. Systems meant to create talent pools and pipelines for enhancing the companies’ talent supply and reducing the high costs related to recruiting talent:

“Recent talent research points to fantastic savings that can be achieved whilst ensuring you retain the very best talent in your organization. Figures from the Association of Graduate Recruiters, for example, show if a business can increase retention from 50% to 70% it can on average save 15% of its total recruitment spend.” (16.06.2010, Director)

Even though there are many different ways to design a talent management strategy (e.g. focus on key positions with talent pipeline that feed those positions, focus in potentials and talent pools, etc.), the focus on performers in the short-run was highlighted in in 2010. The **performers** included only the *performers* concept overlapped with **talent** similarly to the previous year. However, the connectivity score went from 2% in 2009 to 1% in 2010 making it seem that companies were shifting their focus away from performers into the potentials – especially in the long-run. An example of this shift was the following comment:

“There is a risk in putting too much attention on the high performers and not as much on the vast majority of middle-tier performers [and future potentials]” (03.05.2010, SVP Global Strategy)

Performance and Competence in Organization

Another interesting overlap was among the **performance**, **organization** and **employee** themes. On one side of the **organization**, the concepts of *organization*, *career path* and *engagement* were at the juncture of **performance** and **organization** themes. *Engagement* was seen as a booster for performance as it was shown by the following quote:

“It is about knowing how to keep the talent fully engaged and as far as possible, hitting peak performance.” (20.10.2010, Founding Director)

In addition, *career path* was often associated with *engagement* since providing *career paths* showed a road map to the future of the employees. This gave a sense of stability to the employees increasing their loyalty to the company. Other concepts included in

performance theme were *managers, team, strategy, career, and data*. The mentioned concepts were seen as elements that could positively or negatively affect organizational performance. For example, managers played an important role in the organization's performance management since they could influence their subordinates' performance and engagement levels. Moreover, the discussion also mentioned the importance of data in performance management as well as for ensuring the implementation of the organization's strategy as mentioned in the following statement:

"...You can track and analyze trends in performance against your key objectives and values based on the wisdom of crowds through recognition...streamline processes by blending recognition and performance management metrics...create on-the-fly dashboards that report on the metrics your CEO and CFO care about, which increases your contribution to strategic business issues"
(25.08.2010, SVP Global Strategy).

Linked to **performance**, the **competence** was constantly accompanied by the *team* concept in the **performance** theme: working in and leading teams were considered key competences for improving organizational performance. On the right side of the **performance, organization and employees** overlapped on nine concepts and the discussion show that the future of organizations significantly depended on the match between the company and the employees. For example, *culture, culture fit and employee value proposition* were constantly mentioned as requirements for guiding the match between the company and the employee, leading to *employee engagement and employee development*. Moreover, *recognition and benefit* programs were mentioned for keeping up *employee engagement* while *succession planning* was constantly related to current and future *company needs*.

The **organization** also included the concepts of *organization and organizational performance*, which were related to the **business and performance** themes due to their close location to the mentioned themes. Very often, it was mentioned that business was improving which highlighted the importance of talent management for keeping up future performance. As it was mentioned by a Senior Vice President:

"Among the key findings were the realization that business confidence is returning, resulting in increased hiring, talent issues are high on the agenda, and employee trust becoming an issue. Nearly 90% of respondents expected a slight to significant improvement in overall growth prospects for their company in the next three years, signaling a need to hire, train and develop talent. Boardroom as executives recognized that the war for talent knows no boundaries, so

strategies for retention, motivation, engagement and performance improvement are integral to competitiveness." (03.05.2010, SVP Global Strategy)

Employee

The **employee** theme emerged as important in 2010. The discussion regarded the idea that companies needed to have *leaders* capable to lead *organization change* while targeting the *employee needs* for organizations to achieve *success* and stay in *business*. Moreover, employees needed to feel valued in order to produce *value* for the firms. *Rewards* systems were recommended to make the employees feel appreciated. Also tied to the **employee** theme was the **change** theme that included only the *change* concept making emphasis of the need of change to boost innovation. Regarding the leaders and their roles, there were some examples of how important leaders were seen for the organization, performance, employee engagement and talent management:

"The implications for leaders include: 1) Take retention seriously now, don't wait for the recession to recede, 2) In even the best run companies, loss of trust may still be an issue. Develop a clear strategy for restoring trust levels or pay the price in attrition rates and low levels of engagement, 3) Do more than measure engagement, invest in practical daily measures that show why you need people's discretionary effort, 4) Make sure leaders feel equipped to inspire people and know what it takes to re-energize both individuals and teams, and 5) Avoid looking for ever more short cuts in achieving. (03.06.2010, Founding Director)

"But if leaders stop leading, talent leaves, business suffers. Leaders and employees focus on own interests" (20.01.2010, HR Editor)

Skills

One interesting change from the previous year was the change from 35% to 27% in connectivity of the **skills** theme. In overall, the discussion was similar than the previous year since it focused on having current skills for performing a certain job and/or acquiring skills from job experience. However, *training*, *learning* and *processes* were a new addition in 2010 focusing on training based on experiential learning and the process for developing employees. It was mentioned that companies were moving away from the classroom training to more cost-efficient alternatives such as internet-based tools, e-learning systems and video training.

Regarding this shift to internet-based tools, *candidate experience* connected the **skills** and **social media** themes. The connection was that creating a good candidate experience was regarded as important for bringing in talent. In addition, social media was an emerging tool to enhance candidate experience. In 2009, *social media* was just a concept in the **talent**

theme but now it has become a theme. The concepts of *social media*, *social* and *networks* were included in this theme. In detail, HR professionals with social media skills were considered essential for candidate experience creation and talent attraction. In other words, social media were a plus for HR professionals.

Technology and Social Media in Recruitment

Moreover, **social media** overlapped with **technology**, which overlapped with **recruitment** showing a connection among the three themes. The **technology** theme included the concepts of *technology* and *baby boomers*. In general, the discussion was about the increasing usage of technology in talent management/HR related activities and baby boomers' slow adaptation to new technology making them feel as outcasts. The **recruitment** theme included the concepts of *recruitment*, *generation X* and *generation Y*. The main idea was that firms were recruiting new people and different recruitment approaches were needed for generation X and Y. For example, generation Y seemed to use mobile devices to access company website's mobile versions or company pages on social media for job hunting while generation X job hunts from regular company websites using a desktop computer. Therefore, HR professionals need to adapt to create a good candidate experience and to make sure that they are using the right channel for their target audience.

Summary

As a summary, there were signs of economy recovery generally in 2010. Some of the key signs of this were emergence of recruitment as a theme and the decrement of discussions related to economy crisis. Additionally, there was concern about employees leaving their current employers and firms were very much interested in engaging employees in order to retain them. TM was regarded as the tool for maintaining and increasing the employee engagement. TM approaches discussed were mainly focused on performers but there was an increment in TM focus on potentials reducing the overall discussions related to performers from previous year. Employees were seen more as people in 2010 and social media emerged as an important skill for HR people/firms for talent attraction and for employer branding.

4.2.3 Year 2011

The results of "Year 2011" dataset show that the most predominant themes were **talent**, **organization**, **employee** and **skills** with connectivity scores of 100%, 88%, 76% and 32% respectively. It seems that the discussion in 2011 was more diverse than the previous years. First of all, there were a total of 15 overall themes while there were 13 in 2009 and 2010.

Secondly, the predominant themes did not overlap among them (e.g. the four 2009 predominant themes intersected with each other) or were not connected by one or two common themes (e.g. the four 2010 dominant themes overlapped with the **business** theme). In 2011, only the predominant themes of **talent** and **organization** overlapped while the other two were not even close. As shown in *figure next page*, it seems that there were two large theme groups in 2011; one group contained the themes related to **organization** and **employee** and the other group contained the themes related to **talent** and **skills**. Nevertheless, two important intersections among these two groups; the talent/organization intersection and the theme coaching connected these two groups. Therefore, this year's analysis follows the following order **organization & employee** cluster, **talent & skills** cluster and the rest of the themes.

Figure 19 Year 2011 Themes

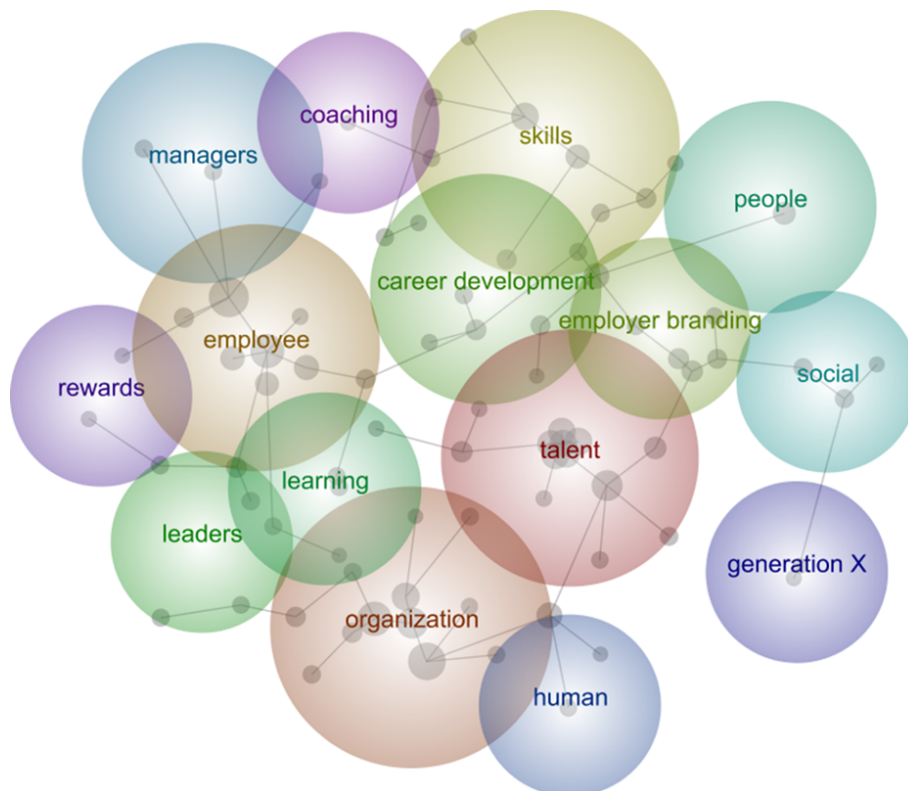


Table 12 2011 Themes and Concepts

Themes	Connectivity	Concepts
Talent	100%	Talent, talent attraction, talent shortage, talent pool, talent supply, talent pipeline, talent identification, candidate, succession management, strategy, needs, technology, attract, data and competence
Organization	88%	Organization, organizational performance, company culture , company needs, business, organization change, culture, change, culture fit, corporate, success.
Employee	76%	Employee, emp. needs, employee engagement, employee value proposition, performance, engagement, development, and benefits,
Skills	32%	Skills, job, job experience, career, economic crisis, role, and employers.

Employer branding	28%	Employer branding, internal recruitment, external recruitment, recruitment, candidate experience and future.
Career development	24%	Career development, key positions, potential skills, process, recovery, career path, succession planning, and economic situation
Leaders	10%	Leaders, recognition, leadership, and strategic
Learning	08%	Learning, training, value, system, baby boomers and potentials
People	08%	People, and hiring
Social	07%	Social, Social media, and networks
Managers	06%	Managers, team and report
Human	02%	Human, and mentoring
Generation X	01%	Generation X and Generation Y
Rewards	01%	Rewards, and performers
Coaching	00%	Coaching

Organization and Employee cluster

The organization & employee cluster included the themes of **organization, human, learning, leaders, employee, rewards and managers**. The **organization** theme included the following concepts: *organization, organizational performance, company culture, company needs, business, organization change, culture, change, culture fit, corporate, and success*. In general, the **organization** went from 62% in the previous year to 88% on relevant score in 2011. In detail, the discussion was regarding to company culture and its importance for organizational performance and organizational change. The following statement was an example of the posts of the discussion:

“At the end of the day, people make up companies. And if the culture allows for a lot of interaction and a lot of free-flowing ideas that are not considered threats to anybody, that company will be more innovative[boosting organizational change and performance].” (22.11.2011, SVP Global Strategy)

This previous statement indirectly highlighted the fact that people needed to fit the company’s culture in order to boost innovation and to increase their performance and success. In addition, company’s culture was considered a factor for boosting employee engagement, which was considered important for successfully implementing organizational changes. Culture fitted and engaged employees were considered most likely to make decision based on the organizational values during organizational changes. Moreover, the following three benefits of having engaged workforce were highlighted during the discussions:

“There are countless benefits to having an engaged workforce, but the main ones are: 1) Companies with the highest engagement tend to grow 4.5 times faster than those with low engagement. 2) Employee engagement is proven to improve business performance – engaged employees drive profit up, and you are more likely to retain talented staff if you keep them engaged. 3) Engaged employees will become your greatest brand ambassadors – make them proud to work for you and feel involved in the decision making process and they will, in turn, paint a glowing picture of your organization.”(11.02.2011, Managing Director)

Human

Tied to the **organization**, the **human** theme included the concepts of *human* and *mentoring*. In general, the discussion was around the importance of human interactions for business and for the organization at all its levels. For example, it was mentioned that human interaction was essential in the recruiting process in order to identify those candidates most likely to be fitted to the organizational culture. In addition, it was suggested that metrics (e.g. in recruitment process or performance assessments) should not be the only base for making decisions or measuring a candidate or employee; metrics were supposed to aid the process but human interaction should be more important. Human interaction was also considered essential for building trust. One example of a post related to this theme was the following:

"The recruiting process is multi-faceted, but human interaction will always be the key. Metrics derived from assessments can be used but they should not drive the decision" (12.05.2011, CEO)

Learning and Leaders

The connection between **organization** and **employee** themes was the overlapping themes of **learning** and **leaders**. On one hand, **learning** included the concepts of *learning*, *training*, *value*, *system*, *baby boomers* and *potentials*. The main idea was the learning and training was valuable for organizational performance and employee engagement. The following statements are an example of how learning and training were perceived in 2011:

"The rate at which organizations learn may become the only sustainable source of competitive advantage." (12.01.2011, Founding Director)

"By providing the proper tools to employees, HR leaders can take a more active role in reducing high performer flight while promoting growth and engagement" (03.02.2011, VP of Product Marketing)

On the other hand, the **leader** included the concepts of *leaders*, *recognition*, *leadership*, and *strategic*. This theme was associated with **learning** because leaders, especially business and HR leaders, were considered as key elements for implementing and improving the outcomes of training/learning programs by creating good learning environment for employees (e.g. employee recognition and the support of employee's development). As it was mentioned, learning was considered part of the firm's competitive advantage. As a result, learning/training was considered strategic and it was at the top of the priorities for leaders.

*“It is encouraging that learning and development is being prioritized by business leaders.”
(30.09.2011, Senior Business Psychologist)*

Employee

Comparing with the previous year, the **employee** theme went from 44% to 76% in connectivity score. It included the concepts of *employee, employee needs, employee engagement, employee value proposition, performance, engagement, development, and benefits*. Employees remained seen as a competitive advantage since targeting employees' needs was considered wise due to their contribution to the firm's competitive advantage. Employee value proposition was revealed to play an important role in taking into account employees needs and increasing performance. The following statements were examples of the importance of employee needs and employee value proposition:

“Keeping these disparate groups [employees spread right across the demographic, social, and geographic] happy, loyal and united is a challenge. Enlightened bosses know that they must combine the four elements of the employee value proposition reward, business strategy, brand and behaviors to build loyalty and engagement in their staff, and that effective communication is the cement binding these elements together” (13.12.2011, Managing Director)

Moreover, **rewards** and **managers** also overlapped with the **employee** theme; neither theme was present in 2010 or 2009. The **rewards** included the concepts of *rewards and performers*. In general, the discussion was around reward systems based on performance. However, the suggested rewards were often no monetary rewards and more along the lines of recognition. Shifting the attention to **managers** included the concepts of *managers, team and report*. The main idea was that managers play a key role in engaging employees, building trust, and supporting their subordinates as seen in:

“44% said their supervisor strongly increased employee engagement” (06.07.2011, SVP Global Strategy)

“Listening and courage are two primary ways for managers to restore employee trust and confidence. Employee trust in their management is critical to employee engagement and performance.” (03.08.2011, SVP Global Strategy)

Talent & Skills cluster

The talent & skills group included **talent, skills, career development, employer branding, people, social, and generation X**. The **talent** theme includes the concepts of *talent, talent attraction, talent shortage, talent pool, talent supply, talent pipeline, talent identification, candidate, succession management, strategy, needs, technology, attract, data and competence*. In 2011, talent was still the predominant theme; many of the

discussion participants highlighted the positive impact of implementing talent management programs. The following statement is an example of the discussion:

“Companies that aligned their talent management programs with their business strategy enjoyed a 20% higher annual return on equity (ROE) over a five year period than those that did not. Returns were even more dramatic among those companies that integrated talent management programs, processes, and IT systems/processes on a global scale.” (14.02.2011, SVP Global Strategy)

Career Development, and Employer branding

IT systems were suggested as part of talent management programs. In 2010, *technology* was a theme connecting the **recruitment** and **social media** themes but, in 2011, it was incorporated in the **talent** theme. In addition, *data* and *competence* were also complementing the technology within TM strategy and programs. The discussion of the rest of the concepts such as *talent attraction* or *talent shortage* did not change significantly. Nevertheless, the focus on performers was the predominant TM strategy used as it is shown in the following statement:

“Of course this doesn’t mean blindly spending on endless learning and development initiatives [for everyone]. Companies should identify their talent and prioritize developing top performers.” (30.09.2011, Senior Business Psychologist)

Connected to **talent** and **skills**, **career development** and **employer branding**, the new emerging theme 2011, **employer branding**, included *employer branding*, *internal recruitment*, *external recruitment*, *recruitment*, *candidate experience* and *future*. *Employer branding* was seen as very essential component for talent attraction and recruitment. The discussion included the perception of employees/ candidates as customers of the firm’s employment experience. In this view, recruiters were seen as branding agents and employees were users of the employment experience. This view was shared by the following CEO:

“When a company undertakes employer branding, the product it is selling is the employment experience it offers, and the customers of this product are current and prospective employees. As a matter of fact, your customers are often prospective employees.” (23.11.2011, CEO)

It was assumed that companies would offer better job opportunities and create nicer work cultures if they saw employees and candidate as customers. Moreover, the *employer branding* concept was overlapping with *career development* suggesting a close relationship between them. The **career development** theme included *career development*, *key positions*, *potential skills*, *process*, *recovery*, *career path*, *succession planning*, and

economic situation. The main idea was that career development activities supported the talent related initiatives by nurturing talent and putting it in the positions where firms needed them the most. On one side, career development aided the company to put the right skills in the right positions in order to really have a positive impact in the company while making sure skills were developed to fulfill future talent needs. On the other side, career development was considered important for engaging, attracting, and retaining employees. While signs of economic recovery were stronger in 2011, the chances of employees switching employers were also higher. Career development provided a feeling of security to both employees and employers by saying that they were in it together for the long run. An example of the discussion in this theme was the following statement:

“Add to this the ability to align, understand, set, and assess objectives, and you have a recipe for massive productivity? The best way to provide your employees with the skills and knowledge they need is through a unified approach [career development] to talent development one that includes all the vital elements involved, from learning and performance to compensation, succession, content creation, collaboration, and mobile management application.” (07.07.2011, Web & Creative Marketing Manager)

Skills

The **skills** theme included the *skills, job, job experience, career, economic crisis, role, and employers*. The main discussion was about fully using and developing the employees' skills at the job/role for increasing company performance. In the discussions, it was highlighted that managers and firms were not taking advantage of all the existing skills in the firm:

“At the same time, only 36% said their talents are being fully utilized on the job. Another 15% claimed they have skills from outside the job that could be put to use in the office - if the manager only asked.” (13.09.2011, Manager Director)

In addition, job experience was considered essential for developing valuable skills for companies. Nevertheless, investing in skill developing programs was considered as an alternative for speeding the skill developing process. Moreover, failing to fully use and/or develop the employees' skills were perceived as one of the reasons for employees to leave their jobs:

“If they become frustrated in their efforts due to managerial or process-oriented impediments, they will feel less enabled in their work and far more willing to look for a new position where their talents and skills are valued.” (09.12.2011, SVP Global Strategy)

As mentioned in 2010, employees were more eager to change jobs once the economic situation started to improve pressuring firms to increase their talent retention efforts. Besides deterring employees from leaving, investing in skill development was utilized to increase the motivation, engagement and productivity of the employees.

“71% of European employees stated that improving their skills at work would encourage them to put in more discretionary effort and stay with the firm.” (25.10.2011, Divisional Managing Director)

People

Overlapped with **skills**, **people** theme included *people* and *hiring*. Having decreased its relevance from 30% to 8% from 2010 to 2011, this theme was back to the same levels of 2009. The main idea was very similar than previous years, employees should be seen more like people as a whole than just as workers. Nevertheless, the relevance of hiring the right person (e.g. new employee) was highlighted as vital for further developing employees' skills and ensuring the alignment of talent & organization strategies:

“Talent acquisition should address the strategic value of attracting and hiring the right talent. That means hiring the right person to fit the organization and the job. Whatever your talent management strategy, it must be aligned with organizational strategy. In other words, take a look at your organizational strategy through the prism of your human capital strategy. If this is not achieved today, talent becomes disconnected from the focus and direction of the organization.”(07.10.2011, CEO)

Social

In 2010, the **social media** emerged with a relevance score of 1% and the main discussion was about the positive impact of social media technology in recruiting. In 2011, the theme evolved to **social** theme, 8% relevant score. In addition, the theme not only included using social media for recruiting but it also included social media for company branding, employer branding and engaging employees, especially younger generations. Some examples of the discussions are the following statements:

“Matt sought to answer the question of whether organizations should expect a better quality of hire with social media. And the answer was yes.”(05.07.2011, CEO)

“Staff are far more likely to engage with, and respond positively to a YouTube video that clearly shows how they can fill out the survey, than an email with instructions. Social media, of course, centers around communication, but this is such a crucial element to HR that it seems incredible that organizations are not making more use of these tools.” (04.08.2011, Managing Director)

Related to **social** theme, one of the key points highlighted was that generation X and older generation Y were more passionate about using social media than younger generations (e.g. young generation Y and generation Z). An example of this point was the following statement:

Broadly speaking the Digital Converts (Gen X older Gen Y) were more passionate about use of social media than the Digital Natives (younger Gen Y). For the converts it may be that the pressure of getting to grips with it, and the novelty of using it, has led to them embracing social media more whole-heartedly. (14.02.2011, Editor)

Moreover, the younger generations like generation Y were considered a new challenge for companies. This generation was considered to be less committed to one single company and expected to engage in proper discussions with their employers (e.g. they were expected to debate everything in a more democratic manner than previous generations) as seen in:

"Statistics show that younger generations will probably stay with a company between 5-10 years at most rather than a career for life attitude. So by default a business will end up losing a large proportion of the younger generation to other companies." (11.02.2011, Head of Business Development)

As it could be agreed from the previous statements, firms would need to make changes in their strategy in order to overcome the challenges rising from the inclusion of generation Y to the workforce.

Coaching

Turning to **coaching**, this was a new theme in 2011 and included the *coaching* concept. The main idea was that coaching was beneficial for developing skills motivating and engaging employees. The following statements supported the benefits of coaching for the firm:

"For example Xerox Corporation carried out several studies on coaching. In the absence of follow-up coaching to their training classes, they concluded 87% of the skills change brought about by the program was lost." (09.08.2011, Managing Director)

"Without a feeling of longevity and progression in their role, an individual can easily become unmotivated and lacking in commitment. This is where structured coaching and career visioning can be extremely beneficial for engaging them." (30.09.2011, Managing Director)

Summary

The discussions in the 2011 were divided in two big clusters, **talent & skills** related themes and **organization & employee** themes. The **coaching** theme was the only theme that did not belong to either cluster. Regarding TM initiatives, the focus on performers was

predominant but potentials were also mentioned. In addition, new generations of employees created challenges for companies leading to changes in *recruitment* and talent management. The **career development**, **skills** and **coaching** themes largely focused on developing potential skills for the future while the **social media** theme was applied beyond the recruitment sphere; employer branding.

4.2.4 Year 2012

The results of the “Year 2012” dataset show that the most dominant themes were **talent**, **organization**, **employee** and **skills** with connectivity of 100%, 86%, 85% and 41% respectively. As the previous year, Leximancer identified 15 themes. In addition, the predominant themes were spread out throughout the map. Only the **organization** and **talent** themes were overlapping. Some of the interesting changes in this map are the emergence of the **potential skills** theme and the fact that it overlapped with another five themes such as **talent**, **career development**, **business**, **skills** and **candidate**. This was an important shift of the blog discussions since current skills/performers related discussions were dominant in previous years.

Figure 20 Year 2012 Themes

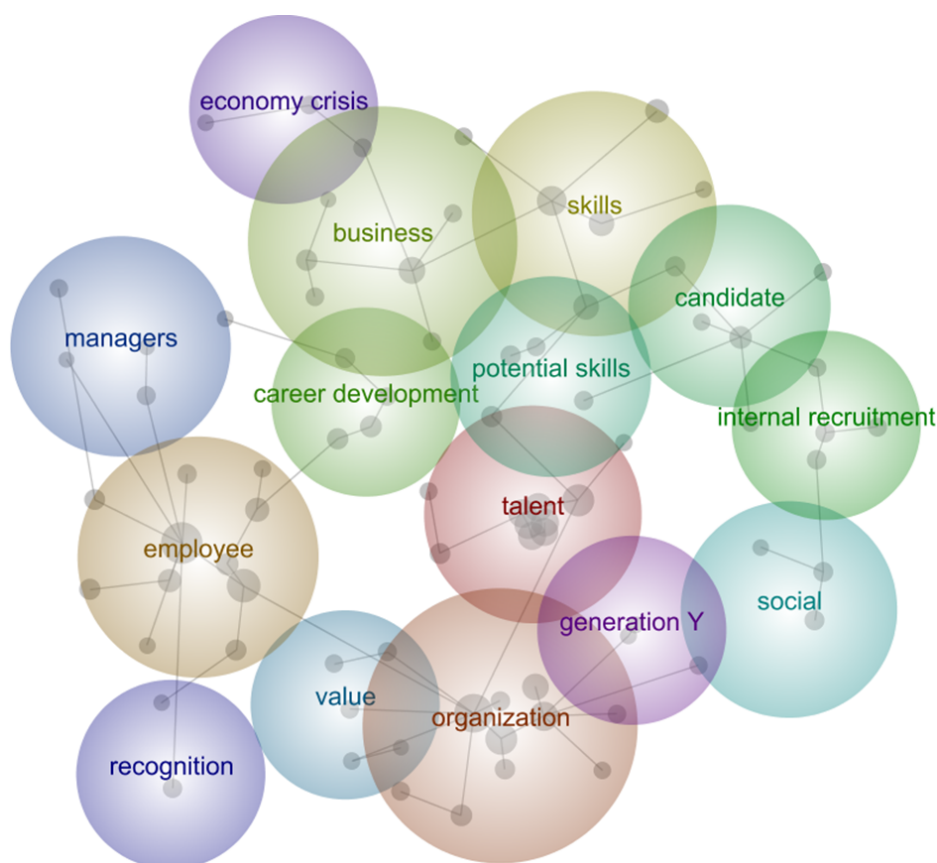


Table 13 2012 Themes and Concepts

Themes	Connectivity	Concepts
Talent	100%	Talent, talent attraction, talent pool, talent supply, talent pipeline, talent identification, talent shortage, key positions succession management , and succession planning
Organization	86%	Organization, organizational performance, company culture , company needs, culture, organization change, culture fit, strategic, change, strategy and, corporate..
Employee	85%	Employee, emp. needs, employee development, employee engagement, employee value proposition, engagement, performance, leadership, leaders, report, and rewards.
Skills	41%	Skills, job, job experience, employer branding, people and system.
Business	26%	Business, training, recovery, learning, benefits, employers, and mentoring
Career development	20%	Career development, development, career, career path, and future.
Internal recruitment	14%	Internal recruitment, external recruitment, recruitment, process and hiring
Candidate	14%	Candidate, job experience, candidate experience, and technology
Potential Skills	12%	Potential skills, needs, role, and attract
Social	11%	Social, social media, human, networks.
Value	07%	Value, success, data, potentials
Managers	06%	Managers, team, coaching, baby boomers, and competence
Recognition	04%	Recognition and performers
Economic crisis	04%	Economic crisis and economic situation
Generation Y	02%	Generation Y and generation X

Talent

The dominant theme, **talent**, included the following concepts: *talent*, *talent attraction*, *talent pool*, *talent supply*, *talent pipeline*, *talent identification*, *talent shortage*, *key positions*, *succession management*, and *succession planning*. Compared to 2011, the only addition was the *key positions* concept while *candidate*, *strategy*, *needs*, *attract*, *needs* and

competence were not included anymore. Moreover, the focus on potentials was the main TM approach in the discussions as it is shown in the following statement:

“I do believe that workplaces that strategically focus on the potential of people and helping make a difference in colleagues and customers lives will always outperform others, in good times and bad. Seeking out the goodness and the talent in every individual is what organizations should really be focusing on.” (22.08.2012, Chief People & Performance Officer)

Moreover, it was suggested to manage talent as a portfolio in which more than one approach to TM is implemented, allowing the identification of performers, high potentials, critical skills and potential leaders. An example of this discussion is the following statement:

“Managing talent and organization as a portfolio. Thoroughly understanding the talent within the confines of an organization would allow us to manage it as if it is a portfolio: high potentials, high performing, executive leadership, critical skills.” (27.01.2012, CEO)

Moreover, the focus on potentials also leads the discussions by highlighting the importance of innovation for companies for boosting employee productivity and organizational performance. In other words, identifying and developing potentials was the suggested way to nurture innovation leading to higher productivity. In addition, employee recognition was mentioned as one of the practices to motivate employees and to engagement them in the long run. As a consequence, the strategic role of HR in managing talent was highlighted as important and necessary. In addition, HR was considered as a key function for the future of organizations as seen in:

“To maintain steady productivity gains and added efficiencies, organizations must look deep into their most important assets employees and nurture this talent over the long run. To achieve this, organizations must take a strategic view of HR data in order to determine performance goals and results, gap analysis, development priorities, provide accurate incentives and rewards for motivation, and identify high potentials and development priorities for succession.” (10.01.2012, Web & Creative Marketing Manager)

Potential Skills

As high potentials became the focus of TM approaches, the discussion about potential skills increased from previous years. The **potential skills** theme included *potential skills*, *needs*, *role*, and *attract*. In general, the discussion was about identifying and having the skills that in the future would be required for the company to compete, especially during times of uncertainty. The potential skills identification task was not considered to be easy

since companies did not have a way to ensure that they could predict the required skills for the future:

As your business develops in response to external demands, for example, roles will change and it can be difficult to predict the skills needed in the long term. They can be built over time though as required, whereas core personality traits of an individual will always be fundamental (18.10.2012, Director)

Since having the required skills for the future was regarded as a priority for companies, not having those skills was considered to be a threat for the future of the organization. Nevertheless, some CEOs were preoccupied about the current skills situation of their organizations:

“Three quarters of CEO s say [answers in a survey] that lack of key skills is the greatest threat to their business.”(12.12.2012, CEO)

Skills

Moreover, the **skills**’ score increased from 32 % in the previous year to 41% in 2012 and it included the concepts of *skills, job, employer branding, people and system*. The discussion was about skills gaps, ways for reducing these gaps and the usage of skill developing programs as part of the employer branding strategy. As possible solutions for skill gaps, the discussion included outsourcing service providers, e-learning programs, and systems for identifying and developing skills for succession programs. HR was considered essential for getting those specialized skills missing from the company via outsourcing providers.

In a way, HR was responsible for making sure that those skills were in the right place, at the right moment and for the right period of time. It was mentioned that often these missing skills were skills that were not always necessary to have in-house. Moreover, technologies such as skype and e-learning applications were considered as enablers for efficiently delivering training programs across the organization while increasing their effectiveness of the programs. Software solutions were also mentioned for keeping track of the available or missing skills in the organization. Investing in skill development was also seen as a way to motivate employees while improving the employer branding. Some of the key statements in this theme are:

“A good outsourcing services provider will also continually invest in its people to offer clients access to the latest skills, thinking and professional knowledge.” (21.08.2012, Head of Training and Development)

“Software can aid the formation of learning and development plans by identifying individuals’ skills and competencies, pinpointing skills gaps and tracking high potential employees. This can then be used to identify on-the-job training and management mentoring needs, which should in turn impact positively upon employees sense of enrichment, fulfilment and workplace satisfaction[employer branding]” (04.05.2012, PR manager)

Business

Overlapping with **skills**, **business** was the fifth most predominant theme in 2012, even though it was not a theme in 2011, including the concepts: *business*, *training*, *recovery*, *learning*, *benefits*, *employers*, and *mentoring*. In general, the discussion was about getting employees to understand the organization’s business through mentoring and training. It was mentioned that understanding company’s business ensures that employees make decisions aligned with the company’s business as well as increases their involvement in the company. In addition, this would increase employee’s retention, which was considered important during the economic recovery.

Career development

Additionally, the **economic crisis** theme with the concepts of *economic crisis* and *economic situation* was overlapping with the **business** theme. The other overlapping theme was **career development** including the concepts of *career development*, *development*, *career*, *career path*, and *future*. The relation between the business and career development was that career development was considered as a tool for engaging employees, increasing employee retention and attracting talent as it was mentioned by a CTO:

“It boils down to: (1) attraction- career development and career resilience need to be on offer to compete in the war for talent, (2) retention- you need to have a long term view of your employees’ careers and allow career development happen if you want to retain the best people, (3) engagement- commitment comes from within, it’s not something that can be imposed on someone.”(13.02.2012, CTO)

In addition, discussions in **business**, **career development** and **economic crisis** themes suggested a common idea that HR needed to increase its strategic role in the organization. The main reason was that talent and career development were considered as HR expertise areas. In addition, HR was called to be a business partner as it was shown in the following statement from a CEO:

“To be successful in HR today, we must be a true partner to not only our business partner clients, but to the entire organization from the lowest level all the way up to the CEO. We must help shape the priorities and plans of the business.”(23.05.2012, CEO)

Candidate

Overlapping with the **skills** theme, the **candidate** theme included the concepts of *candidate*, *job experience*, *candidate experience*, and *technology*. As the war for talent intensified by the economic recovery, talent retention and talent attraction were regarded as essential for reducing talent shortage. *Candidate experience* was seen as another way to improve employer branding and to attract potential talent. Moreover, new technological tools for recruitment were constantly suggested for improving the experience of the candidates in the recruitment process as well as they were seen as good assets. Failing to create a good candidate experience was considered very harmful for firm's reputation and for the war for talent. The following statements support the mentioned idea:

"By making the candidate experience a positive one, you create brand advocates and turn recruits into recruiters". (20.11.2012, Director of Digital Marketing)"

"What you get from a bad candidate experience? Bad treatment during the courting process can cause a candidate to stop pursuing that company or turn down a job offer that is, if he or she gets that far. But that is not the end of it. Employers could lose out on more than just talent when the applicant experience is bad; the company's reputation and business can suffer, too" (13.10.2012, CEO).

Internal Recruitment

Nevertheless, **internal recruitment** was highlighted as another key source of talent, especially if people's talents were developed through training within the organization. This theme included the concepts: *internal recruitment*, *external recruitment*, *recruitment*, *process and hiring*. In general, the discussion was urging firms and HR departments to shift their efforts for improving and developing the already available talent in the company rather than just focusing on recruitment talent externally. An example of the discussions was the following statement:

"Skills that were once desirable are now outdated and traditional organizational structures may no longer be conducive to efficient output. HR departments need to take a close look at their people and audit their recruitment, training and development strategies to ensure that they are making the best use of talent available. Internal Recruitment: Still a very hot potato as organizations look for new ways to drive down agency costs as well as pipelining talent for the future. " (23.02.2012, HR Director)

In contrast, it was suggested that external recruitment's scope should be expanded to other countries in order to attract more talent. The usage of cloud-based solutions such as talent management software, applicant tracking & recruiting software, and analytics & reporting

applications were also recommended by HR professionals as it was mentioned in the 2011 discussions.

Social and Generation Y

Regarding technological tools, social media considered a tool for HR professionals. The connectivity of **social** theme with the concepts of *social*, *social media*, *human*, and *networks* increased from 7 % in 2011 to 11% in 2012. This increment in the discussions was also reflected in the real usage of the social networks as part of the firm's strategy as it is mentioned by a CEO in the following statement:

"The rise of social media has opened up a whole new pool of talent for businesses to search through when looking for new and talented staff. In 2012 80% of companies expect to use social media to recruit for an opening, and yet many struggle to do so efficiently. Without a well-designed process which helps businesses keep their potential employees front-of-mind, the risk is investment in luring the best candidates is being wasted in the wrong areas. At Fairsail, our social media engagement model means employers communicate steadily and consistently in the ways today's graduates and engineers wish to be addressed, over mediums such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter"(10.07.2012, CEO).

Social media and social networks were often associated with the emerging **generation Y** that was the main generation in the discussion. The main topic discussed was the strong relationship between new technologies and this new generation meaning that firms would need to update the current technologies for attracting, developing and engaging this new generation. The following statement was an example of the overall discussion:

"Generation Y members use technologies like Skype and FaceTime in their personal and professional lives, so they will expect to use similar audio-visual communication in their corporate training. Another effect technology has had on Generation Y is the shortening of individuals' attention spans. Therefore, if HR professionals are to maintain a competitive edge, they must update their methods accordingly, embracing the technology available and taking advantage of Generation Y's affinity for all things new." (12.11.2012, Managing Director)

In addition, **generation Y** was considered as the main current and future source of talent. As seen in the concept map, **generation Y**, **talent** and **organization** themes overlapped showing the strong relation among them.

Organization

Organization theme included the concepts of *organization*, *organizational performance*, *company culture*, *company needs*, *culture*, *organization change*, *culture fit*, *strategic change*, *strategy* and *corporate*. In general, the discussion was about the importance of

company culture for improving performance, developing employees, attracting and retaining talent. As it was mentioned in previous themes, the HR function was considered essential for implementing the organizational changes required for fostering the desired company culture. This can be seen in the following statement:

“Firms need to shift the culture of their businesses to succeed and this is only achievable with a solid and savvy HR function.” (21.08.2012, HR Director)

“Your organization culture is tied up closely with your employment value proposition. Whether you know it or not, your culture is drawing to you right now the type of talent you can hire.” (23.05.2012, SVP Global Strategy)

Value

In turn, the **value** theme included the concepts of *value*, *potentials*, *success* and *data*. The relationship among the mentioned concepts was that high potential employees were seen as valuable for the organizational success. In addition, data, especially talent related data, was highlighted as key for keeping track of talent and its development. As it was commonly seen through the discussion in 2012, HR function was considered capable of having more strategic role in the firm, especially for talent management and organizational performance. Very often, managers and CEOs mentioned the important of the HR function as well as related it to organizational efficiency. One example of this was the following statement of one manager:

“To maintain steady productivity gains and added efficiencies, organizations must look deep into their most important assets employees and nurture this talent over the long run. To achieve this, organizations must take a strategic view of HR data in order to determine performance goals and results, gap analysis, development priorities, provide accurate incentives and rewards for motivation, and identify high potentials and development priorities for succession.” (10.01.2012, Web & Creative Marketing Manager)

Employee

The **employee** theme connectivity went from 76% in 2011 to 85% in 2012. The discussion was around employee engagement and its benefits to the organization such as higher organizational performance. Also, HR function and company culture were seen as major factors for increasing employee engagement levels. Differences between employee satisfaction and employee engagement were often mentioned in order to point out the importance of employee engagement. Moreover, the concepts in this theme were: *employee*, *employee needs*, *employee development*, *employee engagement*, *employee value*

proposition, engagement, performance, leadership, leaders, report, and rewards. Some examples of the discussions are the following statements:

“More and more people HR pros and consultants alike have jumped on the engagement bandwagon, and with good reason. Employee engagement is far different from employee satisfaction and measures much more of real value to an organization, such as how well the employee understands the goals of the organization and how committed he or she is to giving discretionary effort to achieve those goals.” (23.07.2012, SVP Global Strategy)

“Organizations are ever-changing and are dependent on the engagement, talent, and energy of their people to operate successfully. At a company’s own peril, they can ignore the mental well-being of your people and culture.” (20.06.2012; CEO)

Managers and Recognition

Related to employees, the **managers** theme remained with the same score of 6% of 2011 while the score of the **recognition** theme changed from 1% to 4% in 2012. The main discussion of these themes was about their role in the employee engagement. Managers were considered as one of the main influencers on employees since the usage of coaching with employees was constantly mentioned. **Managers** included the concepts of *managers, team, coaching, baby boomers, and competence*. **Recognition** was seen more as complementary practice to managers’ roles to improve the company culture for boosting employee engagement.

Summary

2012 was the year when the TM approach changed from focusing on the performers to focusing of the potentials. Moreover, internal recruitment was encouraged more than external recruitment, the economy was considered better than the previous year, and the HR function was called to play a more important role in the firm. Generation Y emerged as the main source of future talent and its relationship with technology was highlighted.

4.2.5 Year 2013

The results of the “Year 2013” dataset show that the most predominant themes were **talent, employee, organization** and **business** with a relevance score of 100%, 84%, 67% and 48% respectively. Compared to the 2012 map, the four main themes were closer to each other because they all overlapped with the **succession management** theme in the center of the map. In addition, the employee theme overlapped with the **organization** theme, which also overlapped with the **business** theme. The former theme was connected with the **talent** theme through the **recruitment** theme. Moreover, the **succession management** was a new theme that was not present in the previous years.

Figure 21 Year 2013 Themes

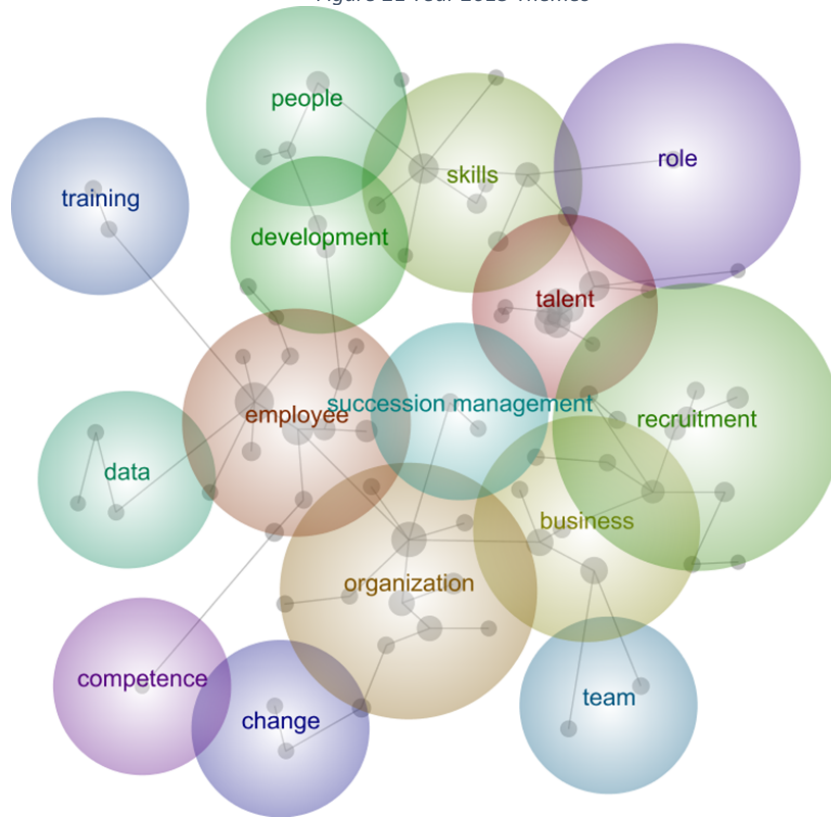


Table 14 2013 Themes and Concepts

Themes	Connectivity	Concepts
Talent	100%	Talent, talent attraction, talent pool, talent shortage, talent identification, talent supply, talent pipeline,, key positions, candidate experience, attract, generation Y, generation X, and baby boomers.
Employee	84%	Employee, emp. needs, employee development, employee engagement, employee value proposition, engagement, managers, performance, recovery, benefits, report and coach.
Organization	67%	Organization, organizational performance, company culture, company needs, culture, culture fit, leadership, value, leaders, and corporate.
Business	48%	Business, employee branding, candidate, needs, social media, social, strategic and hiring.
Skills	39%	Skills, job, job experience, potential skills, technology , and performers
Recruitment	33%	Recruitment, internal recruitment, external recruitment, process, future, strategy and networks
Development	15%	Development, career development, employers, economic crisis, economic situation, and mentoring
People	13%	People, career, career path, and rewards
Data	06%	Data, recognition, human and system
Succession management	06%	Succession management and succession planning
Team	05%	Team and success
Training	05%	Training and learning
Change	04%	Change and organizational change
Role	03%	Role and potentials
Competence	00%	Competence

Talent and Succession Management

Succession management theme only included *succession management* and *succession planning*. In general, the discussion was about the importance of developing the future talent for filling key positions (e.g. leadership positions, top management, etc.) when people leave or retire which can create uncertainty. Nevertheless, succession management was considered essential for ensuring the business continuity (e.g. it was called a business

safeguard), developing talent, and engaging employees. In addition, HR was pointed out as the area that needs to take responsibility for designing and implementing succession plans. As it was mentioned by a Director:

“Succession planning is the ultimate safeguard to ensure a business continues to move in the right direction even if several members of staff jump ship. Deciding which key members of staff would fill the shoes of leaders should they depart is imperative for maintaining business success during a period of change and uncertainty. Developing individuals within a company can also help to boost morale and engage people to remain focused, motivated and passionate about their role within the company. Succession planning also creates agile workforces who are adaptive to change.”
(02.10.2013, Director of Digital Marketing)

As developing individuals for future positions became relevant, the **talent** theme's main discussion was about the development of potential talent. As the previous year, the most mentioned approach to talent management focused on key positions. *Talent pipelines* were constantly mentioned and related to *succession planning*. In addition, it was mentioned that there were emerging tracking systems allowing to record and track the development of the potential talents. Very often, these solutions were SaaS solutions and there were regarded as essential for successfully implementing talent management strategies. As in previous years, it was mentioned that talent management contributed to employee engagement. The concepts in this theme were: *talent, talent attraction, talent pool, talent shortage, talent identification, talent supply, talent pipeline, key positions, candidate experience, attract, generation Y, generation X, and baby boomers*. One of the statements leading the discussion about talent pipeline and development of talent is the following:

“It's important to be prepared now and have a talent pipeline in place, for example, by identifying your high potentials those individuals who display the skills and capability to progress to senior levels as they will be a real asset to your team in the future.”(08.02.2013, Director of consulting)

Roles and Skills

Role, skills and recruitment were also overlapping with the **talent** theme. In the **role** theme, the discussion was based on two interesting topics, the emerging usage of big data in pre-screening potential candidates and common mistakes of considering that high potentials fit any key position. An example of the former is the following statement:

“Organizations often assume their high potential people are interchangeable - they have been identified as having potential and so will be able to fit into any given role. In practice, however, outstanding performance as an operations director in China may not be a good predictor of success for a role in a corporate center or in a different market.” (14.02.2013, Writer)

As identifying and matching the high potentials to each of the different right key positions was relevant, identifying the skills required for those key positions was also regarded as highly important. This was one of the key discussions with the **skills** theme since the mismatch between the employee's skills and his position in the company was often mentioned as one of the reasons for employees leaving their jobs. HR was considered to play the crucial role of identifying the real job requirements for key positions as well as identifying all the available skills in the company for further development. One marketing coordinator and a director mentioned the following statements supporting the discussion:

"Companies need to clearly identify their job requirements to make sure they can hire the right qualified talents. Having said so, when the right people are hired they would be able to excel better in that position and if dealt with in the right manner by the company would remain motivated and perform better." (13.12.2013, Marketing Coordinator for Europe)

"Employees frequently have skills and abilities beyond the position for which they were hired. HR professionals can help their organizations train and promote their employees to fill positions that require higher-level skills." (24.04.2013, Director)

People, Development and Recruitment

Overlapping with **skills** were the **people** and **development** themes with 13% and 17% connectivity respectively. The **people** included the concepts of *people*, *career*, *career path*, and *rewards* while the **development** included *development*, *career development*, *employers*, *economic crisis*, *economic situation*, and *mentoring*. In the **people** theme, the discussion was about the development of people and its progression within the firm through coaching and mentoring. Similarly, the discussion in the **development** theme was about career development, career paths and developing potential skills further.

As the economic situation was considered better than previous years, HR professionals, managers and top management focused more on potential skills. Moreover, organizations supported a TM approach with focus on potential skills, which influenced the firms' recruitment practices. The **recruitment** theme overlapped with **talent** including the following concepts: *recruitment*, *internal recruitment*, *external recruitment*, *process*, *future*, *strategy* and *networks*. In 2012, the discussion focused more on *internal recruitment* while the focus seemed more equal between internal and external recruitment in 2013. Moreover, HR professionals were also focused on developing talent pipelines using social media tools for reaching candidates that are more qualified. However, there was the quantity vs quality debate among the discussion participants. Some argued that social media only provided quantity and no quality. Nevertheless, social media was

considered important for recruitment and the trend of candidates using their mobile device for job hunting was highlighted. The key statements of the discussions are:

“A defined strategy allows you to link and consolidate each part of your recruitment, providing a stronger employer brand, better candidate experience, more effective internal and external talent management and happier employees”. (07.05.2013, Head of Training and Development)

“Almost two thirds (61%) of the UK workforce currently uses a mobile device for work and one in nine has found a new job through this channel. It also found that while employers have started looking at the potential of social media, with over half (54%) using this medium for recruitment, there is a clear gap in utilizing this across wider people strategies”. (13.12.2013, Founder)

Business

Besides recruitment, social media tools were also considered important in general for businesses as social media was used as means of communication (e.g. communication customers), brand development (e.g. employer branding and environmental responsible company) and advertising (e.g. Facebook ads). Moreover, the concepts in **business** were *business, employee branding, candidate, needs, social media, social, strategic, and hiring*. In general, the discussion was about the importance of talent and employee engagement for the firm's overall strategy. Bringing the best talent on board and keeping talent engaged were constantly mentioned as top priorities for top management while HR function was considered to play a key role in the mentioned priorities. Moreover, teamwork coordination and good talented teams in which the members fit their roles were also seen as contributors for success. Social media and HR function were seen as enablers of this.

Organization

Overlapping with **business, organization**, the third predominant theme, included the concepts of *organization, organizational performance, company culture, company needs, culture, culture fit, leadership, value, leaders, and corporate*. This theme's connectivity decreased from 86% to 67% in 2013 losing its second place to the *employee* theme. In general, the **organization's** discussion was about the key role that company culture plays in organization performance and in the war for talent. *Company's culture* was seen as an important intangible asset that helps a company to engage employees and to build trust with consumers. Also, communicating the company culture successfully was important since it was mentioned that people tend to buy product/services for companies that communicate their attractive culture successfully and consistently. Some of the key statements about this discussion are the following:

“Aon also looked at the lag effect of engagement to sales growth and found that companies with above-average engagement scores correlated with 19 percent sales growth vs. companies below the norm on engagement, which reported only 6 percent sales growth.” (15.05. 2013, SVP Global Strategy)

“The most successful companies have a consistent message about their culture, who they are, and what they do. People buy from businesses they trust, and your About page is a great place to start building that trust.”(14.05.2013, Outreach Coordinator)

In the war for talent, *company's culture* was considered as a differentiator for attracting the limited available talent. Having employees that fit the company's culture was mentioned to convert employees into brand ambassador of the company's products and services as it was pointed out by a SVP in the following statement:

“Others know the only real difference between what they have to offer top talent from the competition is the strength of their workplace culture as an exciting, innovative and appreciative environment.” (15.05.2013, SVP Global Strategy)

Besides improving performance and attracting talent, the *company's culture* was perceived as a facilitator for implementing changes in the organizations since companies that have cultures that embrace change seemed to have more successful change implementations. Successful succession changes were mentioned as one of key organizational changes required for companies to remain competitive.

Employee

In addition, **employee** overlapped **organization** and **succession management** and it included the concepts of *employee, employee needs, employee development, employee engagement, employee value proposition, engagement, managers, performance, recovery, benefits, report* and *coach*. In general, the discussion was about boosting *employee engagement* and focusing on *employee value proposition*. Employee engagement was believed to increase performance while reducing employee turnover, especially important during the economic recovery. In addition, employee value proposition was seen as one of the key tools for increasing employee engagement while being considered as one of the pillars of the firms' talent management strategy. EVP was used to attract new talent, and create an ideal company culture for developing the current talent.

Training and Data

The **training** theme highlighted the importance of having strong company culture that supported the employee development and talent management strategies. Often, the HR function was called to be more active in talent management strategies and to use new tools

such as analytics/Big Data, e-learning and self-service add-ons software tools. The former was believed to free HR function to focus on more relevant tasks such as TM and Big Data projects. E-learning also helped HR function to train the workforce, while keeping track of their development. Moreover, Big Data was considered as the future for developing tomorrow's workforce and mastering it was believed to be the HR function's responsibility. The **data** theme, included the concepts of *data*, *recognition*, *human* and *system*. Some examples of the discussion are the following statements:

"Self-service add-ons for HR software allow employees to enter their own data directly into the system. The benefits of this approach are quite obvious: HR staff are freed to focus on other important tasks. "(17.09.2013, HR & OD Consultant)

"The goal of these analytics and Big Data projects...is not just the ability to organise, describe, extract, and present workforce data (which in truth are necessary and important steps), but to leverage that data, to have the data lead to the asking of the right questions, to illuminate a path towards answering these questions, and to help the organization understand and relate the story that their human capital data wants to tell. This! Big data will continue to drive HR and talent management, especially when we allow that data to flow from everyone, not just managers, and we then apply it to broken processes such as the traditional performance review." (12.02.2013, SVP Global Strategy)

Summary

In summary, the discussion in 2013 was around a central theme, **succession management**. As previously mentioned, the four predominant themes (e.g. **talent**, **employee**, **organization**, and **business**) overlapped with the succession management which was seen as one of the most relevant practices that companies must pay attention to. In addition, corporate culture and culture fit were strongly mentioned as essential factors for boosting employee engagement. Regarding the potential skills vs current skills debate, companies seemed to focus more on the potential skills as the economy continues to improve. Current skills are still very relevant but, at the same time, companies keep investing in the development of potential skills. Technologies such as HR analytics and Big Data were mentioned as useful tools for developing and tracking skills development. Moreover, the HR function was called to play a more relevant in talent management and in the firms' operations.

4.2.6 Year 2014

The results of the "Year 2014" dataset show that the most predominant themes were **talent**, **organization**, **employee** and **skills** with connectivity of 100%, 69%, 54% and 41%

respectively. In 2013, all the predominant themes were closed to each other and connected to the **succession management** theme while the four main themes of 2014 were spread out through the map. Only the **talent** and **organization** themes intersected with each other. Also, these two themes overlapped on one common theme, **key position**, which was also connected to the **skills** theme, the fourth most prominent, showing a strong relationship between them. On the left side of concept map, **employee** theme, third most prominent, was connected to the **organization** theme through the **performance** theme. In addition, the **employee** theme was connected to the **key position** theme through the **training** theme. So, the **key position** theme is our starting point for understanding this year's results.

Figure 22 Year 2014 Themes

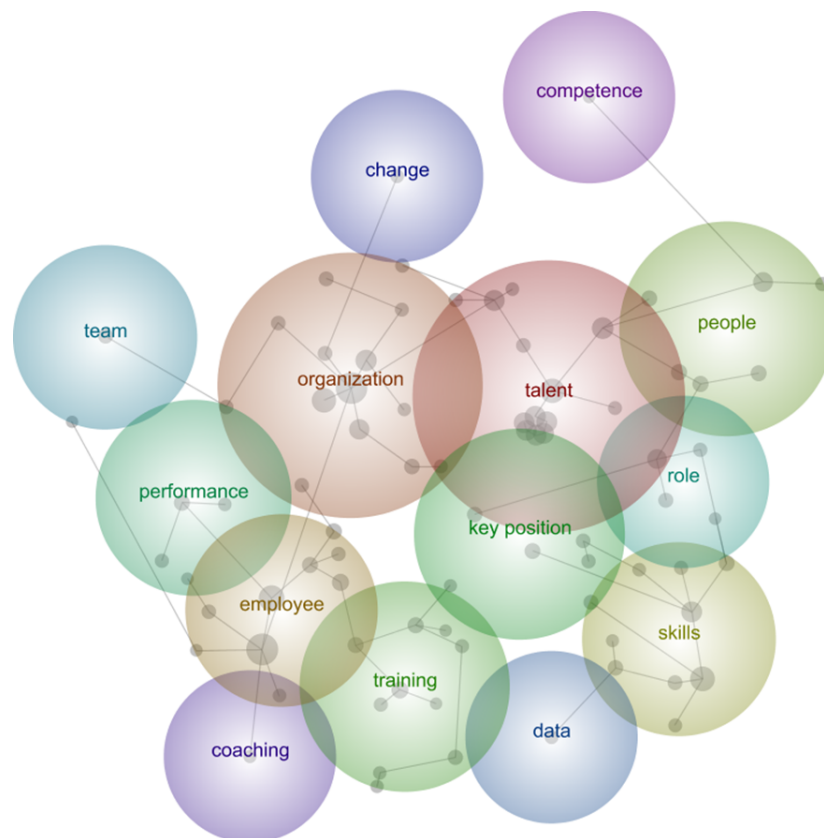


Table 15 2014 Themes and Concepts

Themes	Connectivity	Concepts
Talent	100%	Talent, employer branding, talent attraction, talent supply, talent pool, business, talent shortage, talent pipeline, talent identification, candidate, strategy, future, attract.
Organization	69%	Organization, organizational performance, company culture , company needs, succession management, culture, organization change, leaders, value, success, culture fit, and corporate.
Employee	54%	Employee, emp. needs, employee development, employee value proposition, employee engagement, benefits, engagement, recognition and performers.
Skills	41%	Skills, job, job experience, recovery potential skills, economic crisis, employers, resources, technology , and economic situation
People	26%	People, internal recruitment, external recruitment, recruitment, process, and hiring.
Training	23%	Training, career development, development, career, learning, career path, generation Y, generation X, mentoring, baby boomers.
Key position	14%	Key position, needs, social, social media, succession planning, and report.
Performance	10%	Performance, leadership, managers, system, and rewards
Role	06%	Role, candidate experience, and networks
Team	03%	Team and potential

Data	02%	Data
Change	01%	Change
Coaching	01%	Coaching
Competence	00%	Competence

Key Position

Key position with connectivity of 14% included the concepts of *key position*, *needs*, *social*, *social media*, *succession planning*, and *report*. This is one of the new themes in 2014 and the main discussion was about EVP, recruitment for specific company key positions, and matching talent/skills and key positions while creating talent pipelines. In addition, technology tools were often suggested for successfully managing talent. The most common mentioned vendors were Oracle, SAP and Workday. Moreover, gamification and personality tests were suggested as the best practices for identifying and developing talent. In the discussion, there was a big concern about replacing the amount of retiring baby boomers in the near future especially in developed economies. For that reason, the discussion included topics such as *succession planning* and identification of *key positions* for the company. Example of the discussions' statements are the following:

"The key to hiring successfully is to get that knowledge quickly, so both the right people are hired and they are put in the right roles. There are new technologies out there that help that cause: candidate screening software like VoiceGlance, gamification, personality tests, etc. The key is to figure out a plan now, both for succession and how to bring in new people, before the 57 million [baby boomers] are gone." (15.05.2014, Communications Manager)

Skills

As identifying and defining key positions became important for the companies as for talent strategies, identifying and defining the **skills** required for those positions became relevant too. The **skills** theme included the concepts of *skills*, *job*, *job experience*, *recovery*, *potential skills*, *economic crisis*, *employers*, *resources*, *technology*, and *economic situation*. In general, the discussion was about the limited amount of talent/skills especially once the economic recovery had started. Companies were looking to the required skills for those key company positions.

Current skills were believed to be scarce and difficult to afford. Therefore, the most common alternative suggested was to expand sourcing efforts around the world and to hire people with potential skills putting pressure on the HR function for developing an efficient recruitment process focusing on the potential skills. Besides recruitment, the focus was also set on developing the skills for the future while increasing the people's job experience. In addition, mentoring, secondments, and training were mentioned as requirements for

ensuring the development of future talent. Hiring freelancers for fixed terms was the other alternative for ensuring that companies had the right skills to succeed in specific scenarios (e.g. new product developments or substituting an important employee for a period of time) as it was mentioned in the following statement:

“Employers who are interested in improving their staff rostering arrangements may benefit greatly from taking on freelance workers who may have the skills and the diverse work experiences that cannot be found from full-time candidates.” (08.04.2014, Head of Marketing)

In addition, there was a discussion about globally recruiting potential skills for their development for specific key company positions. Moreover, the *candidate experience* was highlighted as an essential component of successful recruitment processes since it is the first point of contact between the company and the candidate. According to the discussion, the experience starts from the channels (e.g. LinkedIn) used for advertising a job vacancy as well as how user friendly the application process was (e.g. application forms, overall time of the process, interview types such as Skype, phone, and face-to-face). The experience was perceived as determinant for whether the right candidate would or would not take a job offer as well as an increase or decrease of the good perception of the firm as it was mentioned by a HR director in the following statement:

“if a candidate has a bad experience applying for a job, that can play a critical role if your company decides to offer that candidate a position. The decision to turn your offer down might be based mainly of the candidate experience. Nowadays, also one [candidates] can go to a website like Glassdoor.com and learn everything that goes on inside a company as well as recruitment process. In addition, make it easier for good candidates to apply to your company. “Apply with LinkedIn” is one of the most user friendly options that helps to speed up the application process to your company while increasing the candidate experience.” (12.01.2014, HR Director)

As the world becomes more connected, it is important to create a good employer brand since candidates often communicate their good and bad experience to their network affecting the amount of candidates that apply to your company. This shows why **candidate experience** was often related to *networks* and *role* concepts in the **role** theme; 6% connectivity score. Regarding, the *role* concept the discussion was about matching the candidate to the role and ensuring talent retention. For the former, the suggestion was to balance the business needs and the candidate current and future needs as it was mentioned by a Head of Training and Development:

“As a prospective employer, it’s easy to fall into the trap of thinking solely about the needs of your business when filling a role. However, in this competitive environment it’s all about balancing the

needs of your business with the needs of a candidate selfish sourcing is unlikely to secure and retain the best talent.” (30.07.2014, Head of Training and Development)

People

On one side of the **role** theme, the **people** theme with a 26% connectivity score included the concepts of *people, internal recruitment, external recruitment, recruitment, process, and hiring*. In general, the discussion was about the firms’ efforts on improving their recruitment process by balancing their internal and external recruitment strategies across the globe using digital tools such as online platforms and video conference apps for interviewing. An example of this what the following post by a Marketing & Business Development Director:

“However, a new trend is coming to the forefront of the HR director s agenda, which is that of using video software - enabled on all platforms - to hold interviews with people living at opposite ends of the country or even opposite ends of the globe. This solves one specific and prominent HR challenges; to manage recruitment in different countries, across different time zones and cultures.” (19.03.2014, Marketing & Business Development Director)

As more resources were invested to recruitment, talent retention also became more important requiring more resources from the firm. To retain talent, it was suggested that firms, especially HR, pay attention to their talent management strategies to offer career paths and to encourage internal recruitment for key positions. Also, developing HR competences for talent management was mentioned as a key factor for successful talent management strategy. Nevertheless, it was mentioned that in many cases CEOs were not satisfied with their current talent management strategies as it is shown in the following statement:

“Although companies are beginning to invest more in talent management strategies, few have yet come up with a genuinely successful solution. PwC s international survey has found that 77% of CEOs plan to revise their talent strategies because they don t believe their current ones will recruit and retain the best people.” (22.08.2014, Executive Vice President)

Talent

Overlapping with **people** and **role**, the **talent** theme included the concepts of *talent, employer branding, talent attraction, talent supply, talent pool, business, talent shortage, talent pipeline, talent identification, candidate, strategy, future, and attract*. This year the talent strategy was focused on performers and key positions. In addition, the main discussion in this theme was about the relevance of employer branding for competitive advantage. Talented people were considered as the main factor to the company’s

competitive advantage and employer branding helped firms to attract and retain talent making employer branding a key topic to the firm as it is mentioned in the following statement:

“While attracting the right talent and retaining them becomes a critical aspect for business success, research has shown that right brand for an employer can really help in this regard. (27.01.2014, Associate director)”

As talented people was considered a competitive advantage, it was suggested that top management needed to be more involved with the talent strategy as well as it was called to play a more active role in talent related topic/initiatives. Also, HR was called to play a more active role in the firm as well as being considered more relevant by the rest of the areas in the firm as it was mentioned by a CEO:

“Talent management is becoming more organized. By keeping the developments that have taken place in the field of HR it may be stated that it acts as controller, service provider, enabler and driver of business strategies.” (13.01.2014, CEO)

In addition, technology was mentioned as a factor for improving the HR functions. For example, applicant tracking systems (ATS) and different solutions for talent acquisition, talent management, HR operations, compensation and benefits, payroll and branding were suggested to automate and to improve the HR function. However, many of the participants advised to stay away from focusing too much on the technology. The main reason was that human touch in the talent management approach was valued as it was mentioned by a Director:

“Too much focus on technology can be a mistake when it comes to talent management. Firms must find a healthy balance between technology and a human touch.” (30.06.2014, Director of Product Strategy)

Organization

In 2014, the **organization** theme went from a 67% to a 69% in connectivity and included the concepts of *organization, organizational performance, company culture, company needs, succession management, culture, organization change, leaders, value, success, culture fit, and corporate*. The main discussion was about the impact of talent on organizational performance and the necessity of talent management for matching people's aspirations/needs and the company's current and/or future talent needs. Some of the examples of the discussion post are the following statements.

“Understanding and closing the gap between projected and current talent needs can make all the difference in your ability to execute strategy effectively”. (09.01.2014, Marketing and Events Manager)

“If you're successful in connecting the individual's aspirations and the needs of the organization and you support them in developing their ability, the result will be that they take on new roles, challenges and responsibilities ” (04.04.2014, Director)

As seen in the previous quotes, connecting people's aspirations and company's needs was regarded important for talent strategy. In addition, connecting people with company's culture, also called culture fit, was equally important for satisfying current/future talent needs for ensuring sustainable organizational performance.

Change

Turning to the **change** theme, the discussion was about organizational changes (e.g. talent management becoming more important for the firm), demographics changes (e.g. societies getting older in the developed world) and new emerging work practices (e.g. home office, flexible workers, etc.). According to the discussion, changes have an impact on the organization as well as on its performance. The practices of letting employees to work from home and to have flexible schedules were considered to help to boost performance as well as to retain talent as it was mentioned by Principal Consultant & Business Dev. Director:

“There are other things organizations can do to hold onto their best performers. Giving people the ability to balance their professional and home lives and work flexibly, for example, can make employees feel valued and understood by their employer and this is much more likely to make the average professional stay than a pay rise. In addition, this increases the employee's performance” (04.06.2014, Principal Consultant & Business Dev. Director)

Performance

Complementary to organizational performance, performance management was highlighted as essential for tracking and boosting performance. The **performance** theme was overlapping with **organization** and it included the concepts of *performance, leadership, managers, system, and rewards*. In the discussion, mainly software tools were suggested especially cloud-based applications. The supporting arguments for the former applications were their fast implementation and their pay as you go subscriptions which makes inexpensive to try. Furthermore, it was suggested to make sure that managers evaluate factors or competencies according to the job and/or department in question in order to avoid making the mistake of evaluating all the employees on the same competence factors.

Using the same criteria for all employees was argued to make the performance appraisal irrelevant increasing the perception that the appraisals do not work as it was mentioned in the following statement:

“However, a lot of times, appraisal related processes are poorly designed and implemented which is why organizations feel that performance appraisals are not done effectively. A few signs that performance appraisal system isn't working are described below: All employees evaluated on same factors: Evaluating employees of all levels and from different departments on same factors or competencies is not correct.” (06.08.2014, Marketing Specialist)

Team and Employee

In addition, evaluating employees according to their job position, required competences and departmental help to identify which teams perform the best while providing data of what could be improved in the not-so-good- performing teams. Overlapping with **performance**, the **team** theme included the concepts of *team* and *potentials*. In general, most of the posts supported the idea that performance management helps to increase team performance by providing relevant data to track performance and to develop new capabilities. This was seen in some of the comments in which performance management was related to the concepts of “potentials” as in the statement below:

“Performance management software (PMS) will be designed to produce reports from which the management can choose [for further development] the set of people who have good potential and achievement history.” (23.07.2014, Marketing Specialist)

Turning to the **employee** theme, it included the concepts of *employee*, *employee needs*, *employee development*, *employee value proposition*, *employee engagement*, *benefits*, *engagement*, *recognition* and *performers*. In general, the discussion was about employee’s development while targeting employee’s needs ensuring that they would stay with the firm. In order to do so, it was recommended for firms to have attractive EVP that offer a nice culture and opportunities to grow while engaging them to be more productive. Consequently, the firms’ costs associated to high turnover ratios and recruitment could be reduced as mentioned in the following statement:

“Sourcing the right talent is not even half the story it is engaging talent that should be the Holy Grail for any business. Not only are engaged employees more innovative, they are more likely to want to stay with their employer, which means reduced costs in terms of staff turnover and recruitment” (20.10.2014, Head of Stakeholder Engagement)

Besides of making the workforce more productive, the employee engagement was suggested to boost innovation which could be beneficial for the company in the form of

new products, services or processes. Another mentioned way for increasing employee engagement was training and developing.

Coaching and Training

The **coaching** included only the concepts of *coaching* and *rewards*. This practice was mentioned to be the heart of the any leadership development and talent management. The three most discussed benefits of coaching were to channel employees' aspirations, development (i.e. leadership development) and support during times of transition. The main statement about this is the following:

"Benefits of coaching for the firm: (1) Aspirations: coaching can play in helping employees think through their aspirations, decide what they want to share with their manager and take ownership of their careers. (2). Development: coaching can play in talent management is in developing future leaders. (3) Transition: coaching can play in Talent Management is to support leaders at times of transition. If you're successful in connecting the individual's aspirations and the needs of the organization and you support them in developing their ability, the result will be that they take on new roles, challenges and responsibilities." (04.04.2014, Director)

Moreover, the concept of *mentoring*, as part of the **training** theme, was often mentioned together with the concept of *coaching*. Apparently, both practices were considered important for *development* programs and for supporting *career development* for high potential employees, which were concepts included in the **training** theme. The rest of the concepts were **training**, *career*, *learning*, *career path*, *generation Y*, *generation X*, and *baby boomers*. In 2014, **training** had a connectivity of 23% compared to the 5% of 2013. The main discussion was about the importance of mentoring/coaching for development/career development, career paths, and the understanding what the best training practices were for each of the different generations (e.g. generations X/Y and baby boomers). The main benefits of investing on training were developing new skills (e.g. especially for **key positions**), motivating employees, boosting performance, and retaining talent as it was mentioned by a Marketing Specialist:

"Be groomed well to handle the relevant positions, and any skill-set that is lacking in the employee can be developed by providing appropriate training and opportunities. Employees get to have a well-defined road map of their career and it serves as a motivation factor for them to perform even better. Employees who get to understand that their organization has future plans for them, will tend to stay with the organization for longer time". (23.07.2014, Marketing Specialist)

In addition, lack of training was constantly mentioned as one of the reason for generation Y to change jobs. It is in the best interest of companies to keep generation Y in since

millennials are the workforce of the future. However, good training was one of the main reasons of generation Y to stay in a job as it is shown in the following study results:

“According to recent research, one of the top five reasons that Generation Y employees hand in their notice is lack of training development - and 90% report staying on because of good training development opportunities. Generation X employees also need development to help them fill crucial leadership roles while Generation Ys mature.”(17.02.2014, CEO)

Since millennials were considered a generation with the most future potential, the discussants pointed out how firms were targeting millennials even before their graduation from university. Hiring talent so young required a lot of training to bring them up to speed, but firms saw this as a future investment, and a way to create a more loyal and happier workforce. The Goldman Sachs’ recruitment approach was often cited as it can be seen in the following post:

“Hiring people with potential and developing them, rather than overpaying for established stars. The study cited companies like Goldman Sachs that put a premium on hiring talents before graduating from college and taking the time to train them, which proved fruitful. This strategy also created loyal, happier workers. The study found that companies that focused on developing their own people had significantly higher morale and significantly less turnover”. (15.09.2014, Communications Manager)

In addition, the urgency of using *data* for tracking the effectiveness of the training programs as well as the development of new skills was constantly highlighted in the discussion. Moreover, collecting data about an employee over long period of time was supposed to provide insight about what skills the employee has and what other skills could be developed. In addition, this information was relevant for finding the best match between a person and a key position. Ultimately, the suggested idea was to have a data-driven talent management system:

“What does an evidence-based process look like? It means collecting hiring data over time and beginning to realize what works and what doesn t for certain positions, similar to the Moneyball approach to baseball Billy Beane made famous at the Oakland Athletics”. (19.12.2014, Communications Manager)

Summary

The talent management focused on *potentials* (e.g. recruiting, development), *talent pipelines*, data/new tool for TM and *employer branding*. In addition, *employee engagement* was often related to talent strategy while company culture was suggested to play a key role in *employee engagement* and *talent retention*. Moreover, HR function was asked to play a

more active role in the organization and to become a TM enabler. In order to play a more strategic role, HR function needed to automatize the administrative process to free more resources into TM. In 2014, it seemed that the war for talent had fully resumed since companies were investing more in recruitment and development.

4.2.7 Main changes in themes

The aim of this sub-section is to conceptualize the changes in concepts and themes from 2009 to 2014. The conceptual drift is identified by comparing and contrasting each year's most dominant themes. This sub-section is meant to enrich the connection between the empirical findings and discussion sections where the different findings described in the analysis are blended with the existing literature.

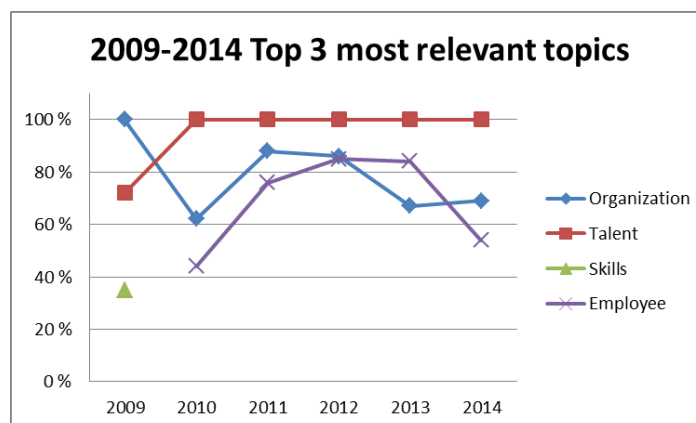
Table 16 Changes of most dominant themes over time

2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Organization	Talent	Talent	Talent	Talent	Talent
Talent	Organization	Organization	Organization	Employee	Organization
Skills	Employee	Employee	Employee	Organization	Employee

For the purpose of this analysis, only the most relevant themes of each of the years are considered *See table 16*. In general, only four main themes were in and out of the top 3 in the 2009-2014 period. *Figure 23* shows changes in the relevance scores for themes: **employee, organization, skills, and talent**.

In 2009, organizations' main goal was the recovery from the consequences of the economic situation through the increment of organizational performance. Talent and current skills were seen as the means to support that organizational goal.

Figure 23 2009 - 2014 changes in the top 3 most relevant themes



In 2010 and onwards, **talent** was on the top of the relevance table. TM and talent strategies became a priority for the organizations. TM was seen as the solution to the performance gaps as well as the mean to sustainable organizational performance.

In the 2010-2012 period, the discussions in the **organization** theme were about the benefits of TM practices for companies that used it and about TM's contributions to firm's competitive advantage. In the same period, the employee related themes were about the importance of targeting employees' needs and employee development. Companies needed to focus more on their employees' needs especially since most employee benefits were sacrificed (e.g. cutting employee benefits, freezing salaries, etc.) during the economic crisis, which negatively affected their well-being. As employees were seen as one of main contributors to organizational performance, TM was described as the chosen technique for ensuring the development and well-being of the employees.

In 2013, employee-related topics were discussed more than organization-related ones. As the economy improved and recruiting activities were resumed, employees started looking for new work opportunities outside their companies. Therefore, satisfying employee's needs and retaining employees became more relevant for companies. TM practices and employee branding were often mentioned as tools for retaining employees and attracting new talents to the organization. However, the **organization** theme scored a higher relevance score than **employee** theme again in 2014. Satisfying employee's needs and employee development were still relevant but organization's needs and organizational performance became more relevant as companies reduced their recruitment efforts from 2013. Nevertheless, Talent and TM remained at top of the relevance table in 2014.

As a summary, the top 3 most relevant themes remained very much the same during 2009-2014 period. **Talent, Organization, Employee** and **Skills** themes moved up and down the top 3 positions with the **Skills** theme going out in 2010 and the **Talent** theme remaining on the top from 2010 onwards. In order to see the changes in relevance scores at conceptual level, five concepts clusters were grouped based on the findings, research questions and literature review. The next section presents the mentioned cluster and the different issues described in the analysis blended with the existing literature for answering this thesis' research questions.

5. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

This thesis aims to get a better understanding of TM by analyzing it through the management fashion lens (using the assertion that talent management is a management fashion). The study investigates the evolution of the TM based on the HR professional's perceptions in the 2009-2014 period within the MF market framework. The focal question in this study is:

- Does Talent Management display features of a Management Fashion?

Three following sub-questions assist in meeting the objective of this study and support the main research question; they also guide the literature review and the analysis of the empirical data.

- How are Talent and TM perceived over time in online communities?
- What solutions are offered in TM publications for satisfying the demands for management techniques for solving firm's problems and performance gaps over time?
- How does the management fashion market explain the changes in the talent management?

To gain some clarity while discussing the enquiries to better understand the conceptual changes in the 2009 – 2014 period, the entire list of concepts was grouped in five clusters: Sociopsychological & Technoeconomic Forces, Demands, TM Solutions, TM Practices and Talent Approaches. The research questions were used in coalition with the talent management and management fashion literature to derive the grouping of the concepts. Leximancer analysis provides relevance percentages for each of the concepts in the analyzed period: Relevance percentage refers to “the frequency of text segments that are coded with that concept, relative to the frequency of the most frequent concept in the overall concept list or with respect to a selected concept” (Leximancer, 2013). Each of the concept clusters has a specific reference concept in order to make a legitimate comparison among them during the analyzed period. For example, the *organization* concept with 100 relevance score is the reference concept of the talent approaches cluster. This means that all the concepts in the cluster have the same reference point that allows to make a legitimate comparison among them. Moreover, this cluster deals with the perceived definition of talent and that is why that reference concept is *organization*. It “makes sense”

since each organization often has their own way to define talent (Iles, et al., 2010a; CIPD, 2007).

Figure 24 Concept Clusters

Talent Approaches						
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
role	27 %	29 %	31 %	33 %	27 %	34 %
key position	53 %	28 %	29 %	38 %	28 %	40 %
potential skills	34 %	29 %	30 %	31 %	26 %	29 %
Current skills	32 %	20 %	29 %	30 %	31 %	30 %
potentials	50 %	45 %	43 %	50 %	25 %	20 %
performers	39 %	20 %	50 %	36 %	27 %	36 %

Sociopsychological & Technoeconomic forces						
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
economic growth/recovery	22 %	16 %	11 %	11 %	10 %	15 %
economy crisis	21 %	17 %	13 %	11 %	9 %	13 %
future	9 %	10 %	10 %	9 %	12 %	9 %
technology	1 %	3 %	8 %	6 %	6 %	6 %
economic situation	9 %	6 %	4 %	3 %	3 %	3 %
talent shortage	33 %	49 %	24 %	22 %	23 %	19 %

TM Practices						
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
talent pipeline	99 %	100 %	99 %	100 %	100 %	100 %
talent identification	100 %	99 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	99 %
talent pool	98 %	100 %	99 %	98 %	97 %	99 %
succession management	35 %	60 %	45 %	38 %	35 %	44 %
mentoring		100 %			25 %	27 %
employee development	10 %	23 %	20 %	16 %	20 %	17 %
career development	13 %	27 %	23 %	24 %	23 %	22 %
coaching		25 %	17 %	22 %	5 %	27 %
employee value proposition	10 %	21 %	14 %	13 %	18 %	16 %

TM Solutions						
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
talent attraction/development	40 %	30 %	41 %	35 %	37 %	44 %
employer branding	39 %	31 %	35 %	31 %	31 %	35 %
corporate culture	72 %	47 %	66 %	53 %	53 %	57 %
employee engagement	46 %	30 %	33 %	28 %	39 %	44 %
organizational performance	87 %	61 %	72 %	88 %	88 %	89 %
culture fit	65 %	33 %	71 %	44 %	45 %	53 %

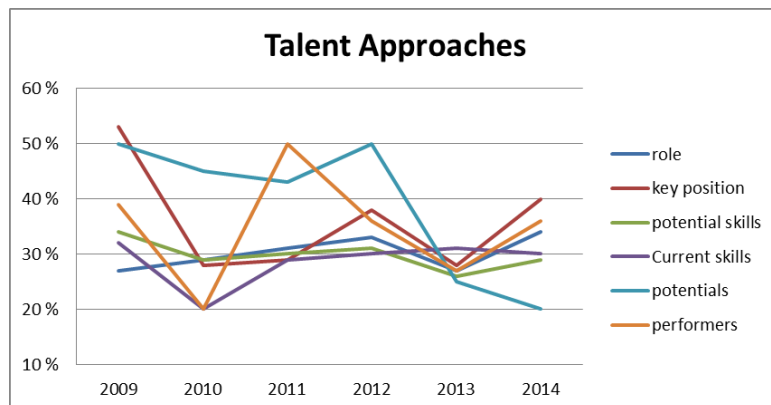
Demands						
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
performance	70 %	44 %	54 %	59 %	56 %	63 %
employee needs	51 %	28 %	37 %	38 %	36 %	42 %
recognition	49 %	36 %	46 %	34 %	35 %	29 %
engagement	39 %	30 %	30 %	30 %	31 %	46 %
talent supply	42 %	29 %	42 %	35 %	38 %	44 %

5.1 Talent and TM over time.

This section addresses the first research question regarding how online communities perceive and describe talent and TM over time. Motivated by the lack of clear conceptualization of Talent and TM in previous studies, the aim is to identify the perceived definitions of Talent and TM in terms of approaches and practices. Apart from identifying the relationship between the HR professionals' perceptions in the online community and the literature, it is important to analyze if those perceptions remained constant during the 2009- 2014 period. The vague rhetoric and the lack of well-defined concepts in talent management and management fashion have been widely documented throughout the present study as well in the literature (Abrahamson, 1996; Huczynski, 1993; Lewis & Heckman, 2006). Therefore, the starting point of the discussion should be the core concept of the studied technique, Talent, followed by TM and its practices.

The different definitions of talent can be categorized as “approaches to talent” (Gallardo-Gallardo, et al., 2013). As consequence, this cluster name is Talent Approaches since it includes the different talent definitions found in the empirical data. This cluster has as a reference the *organization* concept and it includes the following concepts: *potentials*, *performers*, *roles*, *key positions*, *potential skills* and *current skills*. These concepts describe how talent was defined in the discussion and how it was approached by organizations. For example, some companies consider talent to be people (*performers or potentials*) while others consider talent to be the skills of an employee (*current skills or potential skills*) as their definition (Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Gallardo-Gallardo, et al., 2013). In addition, *key positions* or *roles* can be considered as the focus of TM for some companies (Iles, et al., 2010a). The approaches to talent are not mutually exclusive meaning, for example, that companies can choose talent to be *a performer on a key position* only and not consider the rest of the workforce as part of their talent management scope.

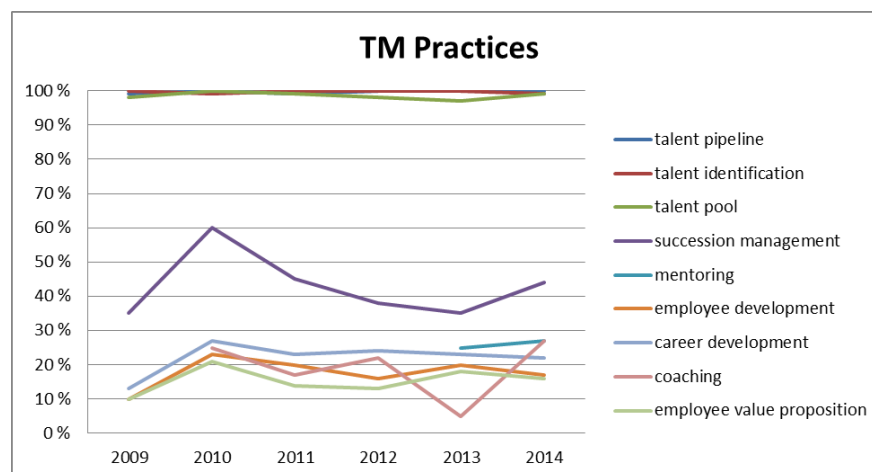
Figure 25 Talent Approaches Graph



These found definitions in the empirical data fall into the two main talent categories defined in the *framework for the conceptualization of talent* (Gallardo-Gallardo, et al., 2013). *Role*, *key positions*, *potential skills*, and *current skills* are part of the object approach, which translates talent as a characteristic of people. *Potentials* and *performers* are part of the subject approach, which translates talent as people. In the 2009- 2014 period, the top concept changed among *key position* (53% in 2009, 40% in 2014), *potentials* (45% in 2010), *performers* (50% in 2010, 36% in 2012) and *current skills* (31% in 2013). Regardless of *role* and *potential skills* never being on the top of the table, the concepts did not show a constant trend since they fluctuated during the period. As a result, it can be argued that there was not a single dominant approach described since the relevance scores drastically changed over time.

It is worth mentioning that the quantitative results from Leximancer did not show valid results for two key talent approaches, *exclusive* (e.g. only a selected group of employees) and *inclusive* (all employees). It was difficult for Leximancer to isolate the correct meaning of the mentioned concepts in the talent management context. For example, Leximancer grouped together *exclusive* as concept in TM, *exclusive* the noun and *exclusive* the verb. Therefore, those concepts' quantitative results are not used in the discussion. Nevertheless, both concepts were present in the qualitative analysis but they could not be compared to the concepts in the Talent approaches cluster due to the lack of valid relevance scores. Even though we could not get a quantitative result, the TM literature favors the *exclusive* approaches over the *inclusive* ones (Iles et al., 2010b). In addition, the *exclusive* approaches are the most prevalent approach to TM found in HR practice (Ready, et al., 2010).

Figure 26 TM practices Graph



The objective of the TM practices concept cluster is to identify the different practices that were associated with talent management over time. The cluster has as a reference the *talent* concept and it includes the following concepts: *talent pipeline*, *talent identification*, *talent pool*, *succession planning/management*, *mentoring*, *employee development*, *coaching*, and *employee value proposition/employer branding*. The four dominant practices were *talent pipeline* (100% avg.), *talent identification* (100% avg.), *talent pools* (99% avg.), and *succession planning/management* (43%). In 2010, *mentoring* appeared peeking at its highest score, 60%, surpassing *succession management*. Nevertheless, it disappeared for 2 years coming back in 2013 (25%) and 2014(27%). The rest of the concepts (*employee development*, *career development*, *coaching*, and *employee value proposition/employer*

branding) remained consistent below the 30 % relevance score without drastic changes during the entire period.

Besides, TM systems, PM systems, applicant tracking systems, learning management systems, public/private social networking platforms (e.g. Taleo, Facebook, LinkedIn), and mobile applications were mentioned as tools for performing TM practices better and faster. These trends have been identified in different TM literature but it is argued that the usage of this technology does not change the foundation of TM or provides a significant difference from HRM (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Ulrich, 2011). In addition, the role of technology in organizations is only likely to continue to increase since it was argued that it helps to attract and retain younger generations such as generation Y and Z (Beechler & Woodward, 2009).

As mentioned in the literature review, there are four streams of thought in talent management literature (Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Collings & Mellahi, 2009). Since each stream of thought is associated with certain talent approaches and TM practices, it is possible to identify which streams were discussed in the online community. From the fact that the first TM stream assumes that TM is no different from HRM, finding evidence of that stream would support the argument that TM is just another newer label or rebranding for HRM- a management fashion (Iles, et al., 2010b) - Based on the empirical results, it is possible to argue that all four streams were present in this analysis. Nevertheless, it is not possible to determine which of the streams was the most mentioned or suggested to companies. The *below table* clusters the different talent approaches and TM practices under each stream of thoughts:

Table 17 Talent Approaches & TM practices with the four TM streams of thought

Talent Approaches and TM practices (based on Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Lewis & Heckman, 2006).			
	Description	Talent Approach	Main associated TM practices
1	TM is just another newer label or rebranding for HRM. It is basically doing the same as HRM faster or via the internet or enterprise-wide software systems. This means that TM is not essential different from HRM.	Potential Skills Current Skills Potential Performers. Inclusive(found only in the blogs and in the literature)	Talent identification Development Selection Succession planning/management Career development Mentoring(found only in the empirical results)
2	TM focuses on talent pools based on succession planning and manpower planning.	Key Positions Role Potential Performers	Talent identification talent pools Succession planning/management Employee value proposition (employer branding)

3	TM as the management of talented people. Talent is considered, unqualified, and undifferentiated good. This includes practices such as top grading and it pays special focus to high performers or high potential	Performers Potentials Current Skills Potential Skills	Talent identification Talen Pipeline, Mentoring (found only in the empirical results)
4	TM focuses on key positions that make the biggest impact in the firm's performance and it requires the creations of talent pools (high performers or high potentials) for filling those positons.	Key Positions Potential Performers Exclusive (found only in the blogs and in the literature)	Talent Identification Talent Pools Coaching(found only in the empirical results)

As a conclusion, the four streams of thought in TM were present in the online community but it was not possible to identify the dominant one. Far from unifying the definition of talent, the data supports the argument that there is no consensus about it since talent approaches were not consistent over the 2009-2014 period. The relevance score variations of talent approaches can be justified by the changes in rhetoric made by MF setters in order to satisfy the MF demands (Abrahamson, 1996; Abrahamson & Fairchild, 1999; Iles, et al., 2010b). As mentioned in the literature review, it appears that talent can mean whatever a business leader or scholar or consultant wants it to mean. Everyone has his or her own idea of what the concept does and does not encompass (Ulrich, 2011). This lack of concrete talent approach is both, one the TM main criticisms, as well as one of the key characteristics of a management fashion (Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Abrahamson, 1996; Spell, 2001). In contrast, the results show that *talent pipeline*, *talent identification*, *talent pools* and *succession planning/management* were the most relevant practices associated with TM. Based on the results, it was not possible to identify if the first TM stream (e.g. TM no different than HRM) was more relevant than the others. Nevertheless, the lack of talent definition/ approach supports the argument that TM displays MF features.

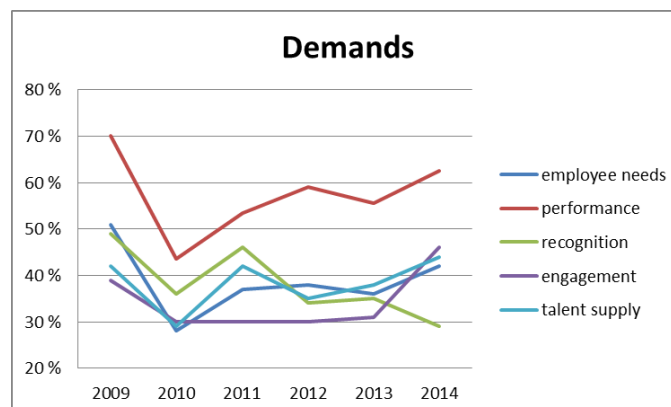
5.2 TM solutions over time

The second sub-question aims at discovering the problems that TM supplies a solution to and their possible changes over time. As the literature review claims, MF followers (e.g. HR professionals, managers, etc.) express their desire (e.g. demand) for new management techniques when they communicate their frustration/despair about current management techniques. Often they use communication channels such as social media (e.g. online communities.), interpersonal networks (e.g. e. formal/informal meetings) and in the research (i.e. surveys, workshops, conferences, etc.) conducted by different consulting companies as well as institutions like Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). In contrast, MF fashion setters (e.g. consultants, HR “hero” managers, etc.) have access to the same channels where MF followers express their frustration/despair allowing them to sense MF followers’ demands (e.g. organizational problems, performance gaps,

manager's desires). As a consequence, MF setters can adjust the attributes or change the rhetoric of a management technique in order to satisfy MF followers' demands (Abrahamson, 1996; Abrahamson & Fairchild, 1999; Huczynski, 1993). For example, MF setters would add to their publications that talent management improves employee engagement when MF followers express their desire to engage their workforce. The results of the present study provide the evidence that the TM solutions offered were the ones that could satisfy of MF followers' demands.

The identified demands from the empirical results were gathered in the Demands cluster. This cluster uses *organization* as its reference concept, which includes the following concepts: *performance*, *employee needs*, *process*, *recognition* and *engagement*. Only the most relevant concepts for demands were taken into account. *Performance* was the dominant demand during the period with an average relevance score of 57%. Companies were eager to recover from the losses from the 2008 crisis and to get over the organizational issues (e.g. disengagement of employees) that have crippled their workforce productivity. This is reflected in the fact that the highest relevance score, 70%, for *performance* was in 2009.

Figure 27 Demands Graph

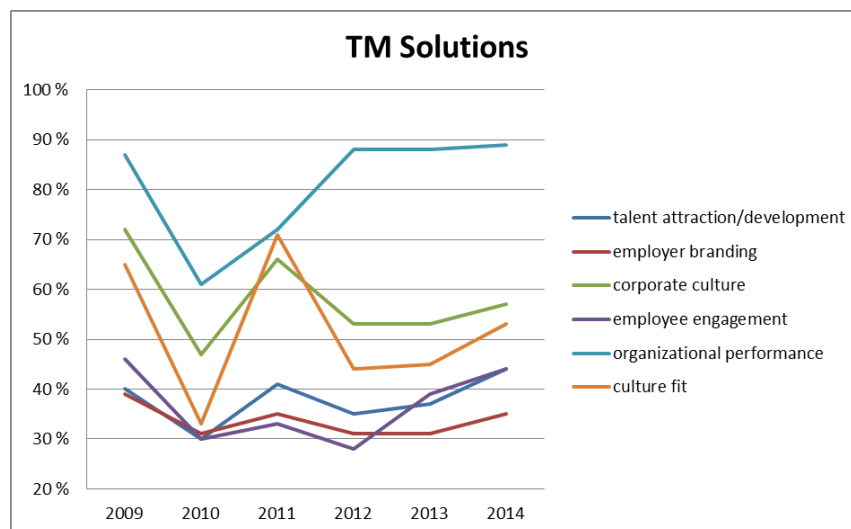


Employee needs had its highest relevance score, 51%, in 2009. This peak is understandable due the economic situation at that moment. Benefits cuts, layoffs, economic uncertainty, and company bankruptcies led to a fall in employee motivation (Morton, et al., 2005). Therefore, at the beginning of the period, management fashion followers were demanding management techniques that addressed the employees (e.g. recognition and engagement). *Recognition* and techniques that deal with recognizing (e.g. no rewards, non-monetary prices or economic benefits) employees work were regarded highly in 2009. Similarly, *engagement* had its second highest in relevance score, 39%, in 2009. After 2010, the

demand for *Recognition* started to decrease and continue like that until the end of the period. *Employee Needs* and *Engagement* also went down but they came up again in 2014, 42% and 46% respectively.

Talent Supply relevance score remained almost constant with a 38% average relevance score. However, worth noting is that its highest score was in 2014. This trend coincides with the one found in the literature. The trend is that companies are worrying more about their future talent needs that they did before (Beechler & Woodward, 2009; CIPD, 2007; Forbes, 2014). As mentioned in section 2.3.1, there are global trends that are “reducing” the available sources of talent. Therefore, companies are fighting for the same talent in a global scale. In contrast, younger generations are less like to stay with the same company as long as older generations did. Consequently, the companies and managers demanded techniques that would help them to attract and to retain talent. For those reasons, it is assumed that the demand for talent is only likely to increase in the future; especially since talent was considered as one of the main contributors to organizational performance (Dries, 2013; Beechler & Woodward, 2009; Lewis & Heckman, 2006)

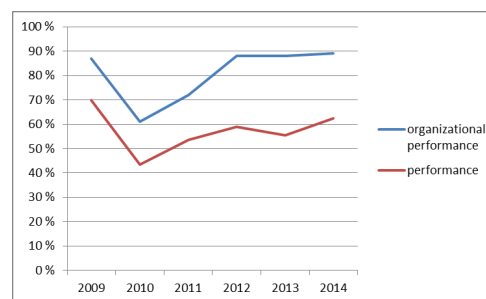
Figure 28 TM Solutions Graph



Turning to TM solutions, the data reveals that often MF setters suggested talent management as a solution for improving: *talent attraction/development*, *employer branding*, *organizational performance*, *corporate culture*, *employee engagement*, and *cultural fit*. The mentioned cluster has as a reference the *organization* concept allowing to identify the changes in relevance scores of the different TM solutions mentioned in the data.

Throughout the 2009-2014 period, *organizational performance* was the most relevant concept in the cluster. While employees were perceived as one of the main contributors to the competitive advantage, TM was seen as the technique that would help employees to reach their full potential and to perform to their highest level; ultimately increasing organizational performance. This result matches the literature's argument that TM improves organizational effectiveness (Ashton & Morton, 2005). Based on the results, it can be assumed that there is some parallelism between the relevance scores of *organizational performance* (TM solution) and *performance* (demand) supporting Abrahamson's idea that MF setters add/change attributes (i.e. add solutions), change goals, etc.) and/or adapt the rhetoric to match MF followers' demands.

Figure 29 Organization Performance (talent management solution) vs Performance (demand)



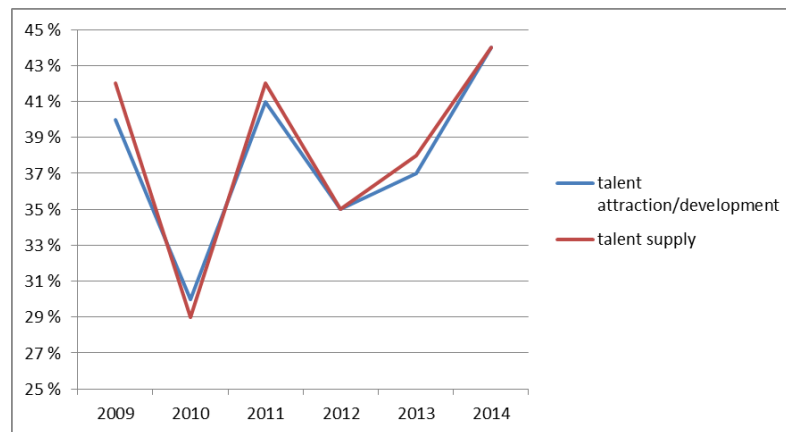
Culture fit and *corporate culture* complete the top 3 most relevant TM solutions of the period. *Corporate culture* (2nd place) only trade positions with *culture fit* (3rd place) in 2011. According to the empirical results and literature, these two solutions (part of TM) are related to each other. The first one concentrates in creating a unique work environment, where employees can be efficient, grow and share the same values. The other one makes sure that employees fit the company's culture (Gallardo-Gallardo, et al., 2013; Ashton & Morton, 2005; Dries, 2013). In addition, the literature and the empirical results agree that both *corporate culture* and *culture fit* are solutions that boost *engagement* (Jauhari, et al., 2013). However, in terms of demands, the empirical results show a closer parallelism between these two solutions and *employee needs* (demand) than with *engagement*.

Employer branding remained stable, within the 31% - 39% interval, during the studied period. As mentioned in the literature, this TM solution is one of the elements of the second TM stream of thought, which argues that TM focuses on talent pools based on succession planning and manpower planning (Lewis & Heckman, 2006). One essential part of *employer branding* is employee value proposition, which one of its goals is to target

employee needs (demand). Nevertheless, the relationship between *employer branding*(TM solution) and *employee needs (demand)* could not fully be determined based on the results.

Based on the different TM definitions and TM four streams of thought, one would expect to find *talent attraction/development* somewhere in the top on the relevance table but, surprisingly, it was not the case. Nevertheless, the *talent attraction/development* (TM solution) and *talent supply* (demand) relevance score graphs were almost identical supporting the idea that MF setters supply to the MF market what it is expected to satisfy the MF followers' demands (Abrahamson, 1996). Even though the graphs show that there is a relationship between the concepts, a casual-effect relationship could not be proved.

Figure 30 Talent Attraction/development (supply) vs Talent supply(demand)



To conclude, there are some parallelisms in the relevance score changes between concepts in the demand and TM solution clusters - *performance vs organizational performance* and *talent supply vs talent attraction/development*. These empirical findings support the idea that the changes in the relevance scores of TM solutions are related to the changes in the relevance scores of the demand side. Therefore, it can be assumed that Talent management and the changes in its content are the result of a supply and demand forces in a knowledge market. According to Abrahamson, the former supports the existence of MF market where MF setters supply “solutions” to the MF followers' demands (Abrahamson, 1996; Hirsch, 1972). That confirms that TM displays the feature of being traded in the MF market. Another display feature shown in the results that resembles a management fashion is that TM's most relevant solution mentioned was *organizational performance* that it is often management fashions' most claimed solution too. In addition, the previous section shows there is no consensus on talent approaches and TM practices meaning that the TM solutions are not based on well-defined talent approaches and practices. Promising a

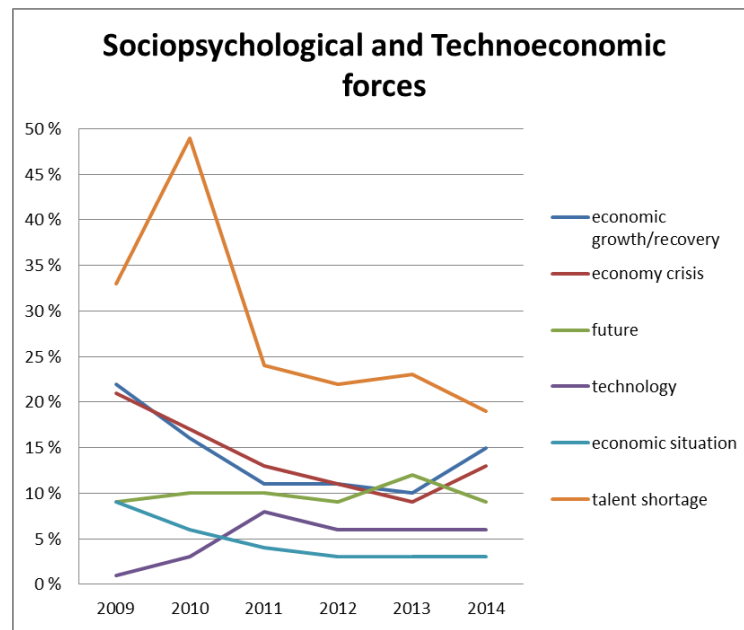
solution with no sound description on how to deliver it is also a MF feature, that TM seems to present. As a consequence, the mentioned MF features displayed by Talent Management lead to assume that TM phenomenon can be better understood in the management fashion context.

5.3. Talent management in the Management Fashion Market

This section aims to answer the third sub question about how the management fashion market provides and explanation about the changes in what it is said about talent management in the online communities and in the literature. According to the theory of management fashions, MF fashions result from the supply and demand forces in a knowledge market (Abrahamson, 1996; Abrahamson & Fairchild, 1999; Hirsch, 1972). In the case of TM, the previous sections have already shown that TM solutions are advertised to satisfy the expressed demands representing the supply and demand described by Abrahamson (1996). Therefore, the objective of this section is to describe the Management Fashion Market, including management fashion setting process, by matching it with this study's findings.

Besides the supply and demand sides, the MF market is affected by sociopsychological and technoeconomic forces that were described in the literature review (Abrahamson, 1996). The analyzed blog posts highlight the following concepts related to these two forces: *economic growth/recovery, economic crisis, future, technology, economic situation and talent shortage*. The concepts were grouped in the Sociopsychological & Technoeconomic forces cluster, which has as a reference the overall concept list produced by Leximancer.

Figure 31 Sociopsychological and Technoeconomic forces Graph



Talent shortage was the predominant concept during the period reaching its highest point in 2010 and its lowest in 2014. *Economy crisis*, *Economic situation* and *Economic growth/recovery* had downward trends from 2009 to 2013 with the last two going upwards in 2014. As the time passed, the organizations and the discussions were less concerned with the economic downturn seen in 2008. *Technology* and *future* had an upwards trend during the entire period showing the increasing relevancy of new technologies such as BigData, Applicant tracking systems, e-learning management systems, public/private social networking platforms(e.g. Taleo, Facebook, LinkedIn), and mobile applications.

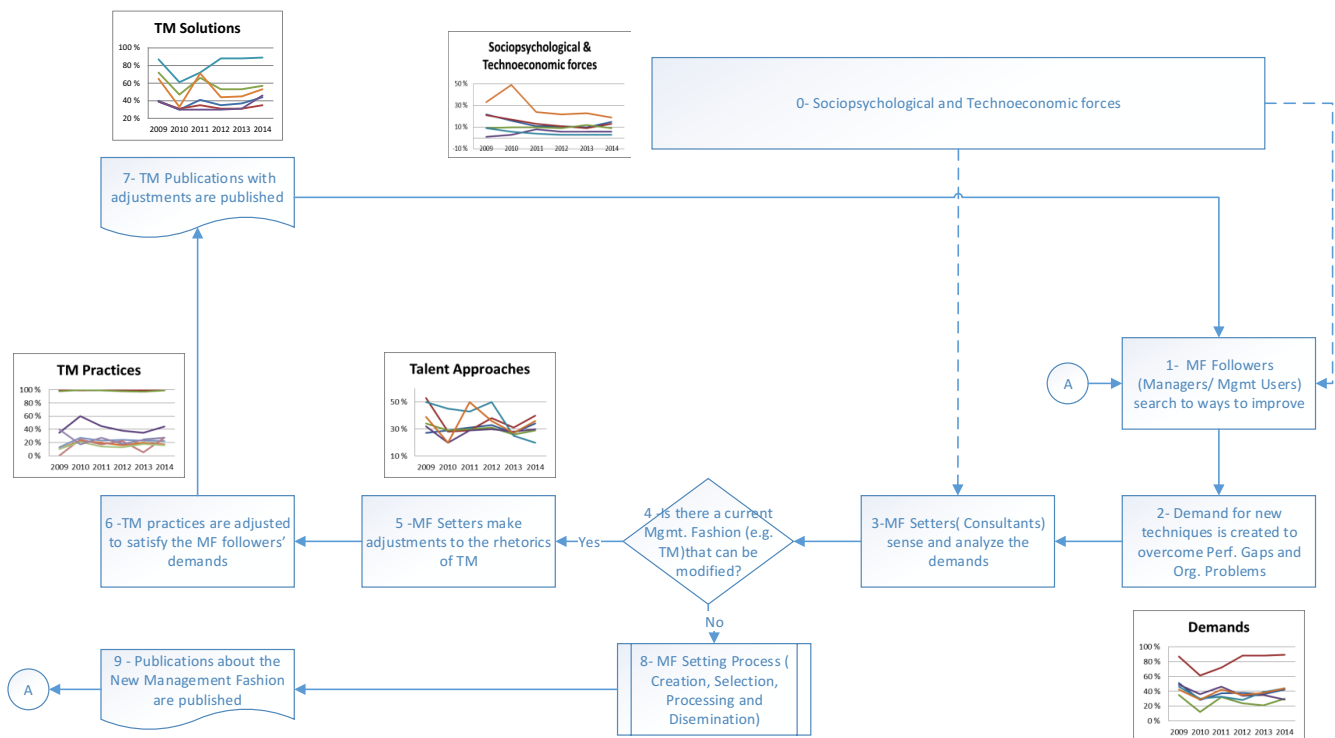
According to Abrahamson's Management Fashion Market framework, Sociopsychological & Technoeconomic forces such as technology and economic situation shape the demand for management fashions (Abrahamson & Eisenman, 2008; Iles, et al., 2010b; Abrahamson, 1996). Based on the demand cluster, there are some concepts that are related to ones in the Sociopsychological & Technoeconomic forces cluster (e.g. *talent shortage* from forces' cluster & *talent supply* from demands' cluster). However, the connections and the relationships among the concepts between the two clusters are not obvious and it is difficult to make them based on the empirical results.

Moreover, the literature mentions that the combinations of one or two & Technoeconomic forces can generate one or more specific demands (Abrahamson, 1996; Abrahamson & Fairchild, 1999; Lang & Ohana, 2012). From reading the blog posts, it can be assumed that *economic situation* and *economic crisis* could have shaped the demand for *performance*,

employee needs, and engagement. During and right after the crisis, employees had to work more to compensate for the layoffs while having low motivation after having most of their benefit cuts. Therefore, MF followers demanded techniques to increase employee engagement and to boost performance. Nevertheless, Sociopsychological & Technoeconomic forces were the most difficult to identify and conceptualize from the text for the researcher and for Leximancer. The reason is that MF followers were vague about what Sociopsychological & Technoeconomic forces affected their firms. Very often economic forces or talent shortages were root causes of performance gaps.

Regarding MF fashion market, the researcher has expanded Abrahamson's framework for a better description and combination with the empirical results. The framework has been drawn using a flow chart technique for showing the researcher's perceived sequence of actions inside the MF market. This technique is characterized for its strong communication ability and it is often used for describing models for learning and for decision support to process development/design (Aguilar-Savén, 2004). Each of the actions is numbered and it is described briefly. It is important to mention that actions in the MF market are constantly repeating like an iterative process.

Figure 32 Talent Management in the Management Fashion Market



0 – Sociopsychological & Technoeconomic forces. As described in this section, sociopsychological & technoeconomic forces impact and influence the MF followers' (e.g. managers, HR professional) demands. From the empirical result, it can be deduced that these forces have an impact on the MF followers' demand. In this study, it was shown that there was a relation between the relevance scores of *talent shortage* from forces' cluster and *talent supply* from demands' cluster implying that they moved similarly during the period. In addition, these forces affect the MF setters since often MF setters work for companies that are affected by the same forces as it was seen in the empirical results. For example, the economic crisis affected consulting companies as well as its employees (e.g. HR consultants-MF setters). They also experienced employee benefits cut, employee layoffs, economic uncertainty, and company bankruptcies. Therefore, the impact of sociopsychological & technoeconomic forces is not limited only to the MF followers as suggested by Abrahamson (1996). Nevertheless, more research needs to be done in order to understand how and to what extent the mentioned forces affect MF followers.

1 – MF Followers(e.g. HR managers, HR consultants, Mgmt. User, etc.) constantly search for improvement. As a result of the impact of different sociopsychological & technoeconomic forces, MF followers search management techniques to be seen as individualistic/novel, to overcome frustration/despair as well as to cope with macroeconomical changes, new technologies and/or new legislations (Iles, et al., 2010a; Abrahamson, 1996).

2 – Demand for new management techniques is created. MF followers can communicate their frustration/despair about current management techniques as well as their desire for new management techniques through different channels such as social media (i.e. blogs, forums, LinkedIn, etc.) and the research (i.e. surveys, workshops, conferences, etc.) conducted by different consulting companies as well as institutions like Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). In this study, MF followers expressed their demand (e.g. *performance, employee needs, process, recognition, engagement*) for new management techniques in HR zone.

3 – MF setters sense and analyze the demand. As described in the literature review, MF setters sense and analyze the demand in order to produce management techniques to satisfy that demand. (Abrahamson, 1996). Due to the fact that MF setters often have access to the channels used by MF followers to express their demands, MF setters are able to sense their demands. In the case of this study, the blog posts were public to anyone. Researching how

MF setters analyze the demands was not within the scope of the study but it would be an interesting topic to further research.

4 – Is there a current MF (in this case, TM) that can be modified to satisfy the current demands? Based on the demands analysis, MF setters make the decision of whether to create a new management fashion or to change the rhetoric of a current MF. If they decide the later one, they do the necessary changes to a current MF. If they decide to create a new management fashion, they go into the MF setting process. In other words, MF setters decide whether to extend a current MF by adjusting them or to create an entirely new MF. In the case of TM, the empirical results suggest that MF setters continuously chose to extend TM by adjusting TM (e.g. changes in talent approaches, TM practices, and TM solutions) to keep MF followers interested in it.

5 – MF setters adjust the TM rhetoric. This means that MF setters change some of the definitions of a current MF in order to satisfy the MF followers' demand. In the case of TM in this study, the MF setters constantly changed the talent approaches. Depending of the year and on the demand, they would choose the talent approach most likely to satisfy MF followers. For example, *key positions* and *performers* were more relevant on the years after the economic crisis (e.g. 2009) because MF followers desired higher performance (e.g. performers now rather than potentials for the future) in the company's positions believed to contribute the most to organizational performance.

6 – TM practices are adjusted to satisfy MF followers' demand. After adjusting the rhetoric and definitions of key concepts, the MF setters could adjust the practices related to the MF. As shown in the results, four different TM streams of thought were found. Each of the streams favored certain TM practices and talent approaches over others.

7 – TM publications with adjustment are published. After modifying the talent approaches and the practices related to TM, MF setters publish new articles with the adjustments made to TM. These changes are reflected in the "solutions" that TM provides for organizations. The results show that the relevance scores of *organizational performance*(TM solution) & *performance* (demand) and *talent attraction/development*(TM solution) & *talent supply* (demand) behaved similarly throughout the period. When the demand size increases, the other one does too. Nevertheless, this study was not able to prove any casual-effect relationship.

The TM publications go back to the MF followers to keep them following TM and the iterative process continue until the answer to the question “Is there a current MF (e.g. TM) that can be modified to satisfy the current demand?” is “no”. Then the process goes to activity number eight.

8 – MF setters start a New Management Fashion Setting process. This process involves four stages: creation, selection, processing and dissemination. These stages are described in the literature review. In this study, it was not possible to analyze the four steps since the TM phenomenon has been around for a while. In addition, the data is not from the time where TM was launched as a management fashion.

9 – Publications about a new MF are published. The result of the management setting process is a new management fashion. Towards the end of studied period, some HR professionals were already talking about Strategic TM which was different than TM. Collings & Mellahi’s *Strategic talent management: A review and research agenda* is one of few academic papers that aims to define Strategic TM as well as differentiates it from TM (2009). In addition, new concepts such as workforce analytics and talent analytics were mentioned as the next techniques to replace TM.

As a conclusion, the MF fashion market seems to explain the overtime changes in TM supporting the assumption that TM could be the result of the a MF fashion market and a MF setting process. Being the result of a supply and demand in a knowledge market is one of the key characteristics of MFs defined in the literature review. The next discussion section summarizes the MF characteristics displayed by TM.

5.4 Management fashion features displayed by TM

The aim of this last discussion section is to answer the focal question of this study: Does talent management display MF features? Through the literature review and the previous discussion sections, the MF features displayed by TM were described. The following table shows the summary of the MF features defined in the literature and combines them with the study results:

Table 18 Management Fashion Features displayed by TM

MF Features	Outcome of the study	Description
Rational and Progressive	Identified	The empirical results show that MF setter made TM to be seem attractive, modern, rational and progressive. The proof is that the majority publications describe TM as “innovative”, “efficient”, and “systematic” for ensuring “the talent (i.e. people, skills, attitudes, and mindset) development” for improving current “organizational performance” and ensuring “sustainable growth” in the future.
Lifecycle	No evidence	It was not possible to test this feature with the chosen research method. Nevertheless, Iles, et al., 2010b show that the popularity curves of TM publications suggest TM a MF whose popularity has yet to peak, let alone to fall.(2010b)
Transitory	Identified to some extend	Previous research has shown that TM emerged in the 1990s with the "war for talent" article and it has been growing since then. Therefore, it still to be seen if TM as a whole is transitory. Nevertheless, the lack of clarity and agreement in TM literature allows for the different TM stream of thought to be transitory. As shown the empirical results, there are period of time which one of TM stream of thought is highlighted and the rest are just less relevant.
Bandwagon Effect	Identified to some extend	From the empirical results is no possible to prove the bandwagon effect. Nevertheless, the analyzed blogs contain the results of research conducted by CIPD, Deloitte and PwC in which 75% of participants companies claim to have implemented or in the process of implement TM. Therefore, the bandwagon effect is proved indirectly.
Advertised by MF Setters	Identified	The literature review and the empirical results support this feature. Even though the analyzed online community has "MF setters", there was no reference to academic papers in the blog content.
Come in waves	No evidence	In order to test this feature, more than one MF must be analyzed for confirming that one MF replaces the other MF. However, the empirical results show that emergence of "strategic TM" “Workforce analytics” and “talent analytics” at the end of the analyzed period. Could this be birth of a new MF?
Rhetoric	Identified	The result shows that TM is argued to increase overall organizational performance by satisfying the organization' current and future talent needs. This based on the assumption that talent is the main contributor of competitive advantage. Nevertheless, there is a lack of clarity and definition on the definition of talent and TM. Moreover, the results shows that talent and TM definitions are constantly changing throughout the analyzed period
Lack of Empiral Data	Identified	The empirical results support the lack of empirical data to support TM. There are not clear studies that demonstrate exactly how and to what extend TM benefits organizations that used it. However, there are plenty anecdotes and success stories about how TM presumably increased organizational performance.
Old wine in new botles	Identified to some extend	The empirical results show four TM main streams of thought. One of these streams suggests that TM is the same as HRM but faster. Moreover, some of the TM “new ideas” and “practices” are work already done in the fields of succession and workforce planning. For example, the ideas TM initiatives such as assessment centers, succession planning and 360-degree feedback, are not new, stemming from 1950s.
The result of MF market and MF setting process	Supported to some extend	The empirical results shows to some extended that TM is the result of a MF market and MF setting process. MF followers demanded new techniques and MF setters provided TM to satisfy that demand even though there are not clear definitions for talent and TM. It seems that TM is constantly re-adjusted to satisfy the demands over the years.

As a conclusion, TM displays various MF features described in the presented literature review. Suggesting that TM is MF or that it displays MF features is not something very new. Lewis & Heckman’s review of TM literature have already identified some MF

features of TM (2006). Similarly, Iles, et al.'s PMI(Print Media Indicators) study on TM also suggested that TM displays features of TM (2010b). Nevertheless, this study used an innovative research design that has not been used before for studying talent management through the management fashion lens. In addition, the study tried to match the empirical results to the Abrahamson's MF market and MF setting process in order to further the understanding on how it works.

6. CONCLUSION

This final chapter provides an overview of the study and combines the different issues discussed in the previous sections. Firstly, a research summary is presented including research objectives and methods used in this thesis. Secondly, the contribution and managerial implications are described. Thirdly, the limitations and some suggestions for future research are provided.

6.1 Research Summary

This thesis aims to get a better understanding of TM by analyzing it through the management fashion lens (using the assertion that talent management is a management fashion). The study investigates the evolution of the TM based on the HR professional's perceptions in the 2009-2014 period within the MF fashion market framework. The focal question in this study is:

- Does Talent Management display features of Management Fashion?

Three following sub-questions assist in meeting the objective of this study and support the main research question; they also guide the literature review and the analysis of the empirical data.

- How are Talent and TM perceived over time in online communities?
- What solutions are offered in TM publications for satisfying the demands for management techniques for solving firm's problems and performance gaps over time?
- How does the management fashion market explain the changes in the talent management?

The literature review was divided in 4 sections. The first section described the overall evolution of the Management Fashion studies over time, which functioned as background for following sections of the literature review. Management fashions' characteristics were

described and it was highlighted how MFs shape the management techniques that thousands of managers look for in order to face real managerial problems and challenges. The second and third sections focus on the meaning of talent and TM as well as their evolution over time. There is no consensus on what talent means and what it encompasses (Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Ulrich, 2011). Moreover, four TM streams of thought were found based on the talent approach (e.g. talent definition) and how organizations implemented (e.g. exclusive or inclusive, etc.) talent management (Collings & Mellahi, 2009). The last section focuses on talent management in the management fashion context. In detail, the management fashion features displayed by TM and management fashion market are described.

Regarding the methodology, this thesis employed an innovative research design that included data collected from blogs of well-established online HR community in UK. The selection of the blog posts was based on the key words of “talent” and “talent management” leading to the collection of 1236 blog posts from HRzone. The data analysis was performed using the Leximancer software that allowed the thematic and semantic analysis by providing qualitative evidence of the data and quantifying the qualitative data.

6.2 Theoretical Contribution

This thesis provides a more complete overview of the talent management phenomenon based on the perceptions of HR professionals in a global online community. In addition, it uses the management fashion market in order to get more insight on talent management and to provide a possible explanation to TM’s lack of clarity in terms of definition, practices and goals.

In terms of TM literature, the empirical findings seem to generally support the assertion that Talent Management displays management fashion features. Moreover, the study provides a detailed map of how the HR professionals perceived talent, talent management, and the solutions provided by TM overtime (e.g. longitudinal changes). Even though there was no consensus in the literature or in the empirical results about the talent and TM definitions, the bandwagon effect created by TM continues to grow. Different sources in the data (e.g. CIPD’s reports), and in the literature review show that many companies believe that TM offers new—not old or rebranded practices—ways of managing the organizations’ most valuable sources, their people, in a more efficient and effective way (Iles, et al., 2010a).

In terms of MF literature, this study furthers the understanding regarding the management fashion mechanisms to promote TM in online communities making it a trending topic. For academics, it will provide empirical knowledge about fashion setting mechanisms in order to further the theory of management fashions and to continue studying how TM influence the management idea evolution over time.

6.3. Practical implications

For companies, understanding the management fashion mechanisms further can provide useful training material for management fashion followers such as line managers and HR practitioners (Abrahamson, 1996). The training can help them to identify what elements of a certain MF are useful for their firm and what elements are just rhetoric for matching their wants and needs (e.g. vague concepts). Ultimately, the training could help to prevent followers from jumping into the bandwagon effect too soon and to avoid irreversible damages to their firms (Abrahamson & Eisenman, 2008; Abrahamson, 1996; Lang & Ohana, 2012).

In terms of TM implementation, this study shows that there is no universal answer to what approach for TM implementation is the best or the most recommended. For that reason, some scholars believe that it seems that the organization's mission, culture, goals, and business context determine an organization's approach to TM implementation (Garrow & Hirsh, 2008). This also relates to the fact that organizations seem to define what talent is in their own context and design their TM accordingly to their definition (Tansley, 2011). Nevertheless, it seems that the way organization defines and treat talent is becoming a critical factor in an organization's success.

For example, companies that choose the TM perspective of social capital most likely will implement inclusive extensive training programs, career development programs, hiring internally and focus on retention. In addition, the focus will be also on enhancing networks, team work and organizational culture. The reason is that social capital perspective focus is not limited on the individual talent but also focuses in improving the organizational factors that positively impact talent development and performance. In contrast, companies that choose exclusive-people perspective will focus more resources to a small segment of the workforce. If the organization sees talent as inborn rather than something that can be developed, its main focus will be on attracting talents, hiring top performers externally and retaining the elite group. In addition, fewer resources will be allocated to the employees outside the elite group.

As a conclusion, it is very important for organizations to understand the different approaches to TM implementation in order to choose the adequate one for them base on the organization's mission, culture, goals, and business context.

6.3 Limitations and future research directions

Regardless of the benefits of the innovative research design, there are some limitations. First, the empirical data is limited to the perceptions and opinions of the group of HR professionals that are active in the selected online community. Second, the blog collection was based on a keyword search that made it difficult to determine how important TM is in with respect to the total amount of blog posts in the selected online community. The third limitation is associated to the data analysis of this thesis. Even though Leximancer provides automated data analysis with limited input from the researcher, the interpretation of the maps and conclusion of the qualitative analysis are subject to the researcher's interpretation. In addition, the combination of qualitative analysis and quantification of qualitative data proved to be rather difficult because some concepts take the form of both nouns and verbs, and have multiple meanings. Therefore, the concepts were subjected to the researcher' interpretation. In some cases, the researcher had to define or combine concepts based on his perception and knowledge of related literature.

Related to the design of this thesis, I suggest a few possible directions for future research. As mentioned, there are different approaches to TM implementation found in the literature and the empirical results (Iles, et al., 2010a; Gallardo-Gallardo, et al., 2013). Therefore, it will be interesting to research what factors (e.g. organization's mission, culture, technology, etc.) determine the organizational decision on how to approach TM implementation in different contexts. Also related to TM, it will be interesting to investigate what has led to the upsurge of interest in TM among organizations and HR professionals in particular, in both rhetorical and practical terms. Interviews and other qualitative techniques would be useful here (Iles, et al., 2010b). Moreover, the concepts of "TM analytics" and "Strategic TM" mentioned in the data are interesting to further research. Could it be the next management fashion in HRM?

Regarding MF future research, there are some possible future research directions. This study was limited only to the management technique of TM. Therefore, it would be interesting to research what triggers the rise and fall of a management fashion using TM and other similar management techniques such as HRM, workforce planning, or HR analytics or Talent analytics. Another interesting direction is to study the management

fashions impact fashion setting organizations (e.g. consulting firms) as well as MF setters (e.g. consultant). In the data, it was noticed that the same consultant could be sometimes a MF setter and a MF follower some other times. Therefore, it would be interesting how the switch from a setter to a follower or vice versa works.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A

User Define Concepts	Words included	User Define Concepts	Words included
Attract	Attract	internal recruitment	internal recruitment internal recruiting
Baby boomers	Baby boomers	Job experience	Experience Job experience
Benefits	Benefits	Key positions	Key positions Key position
candidate	candidate	Leadership	Leader Leadership
candidate experience	candidate experience	Mentoring	Mentoring
career	career	networks	networks
career development	career development	organization	Companies Company firm firms Organisation Organisations Organization Organizations
career path	career path	Organization change	Organization change Organizational change
coaching	coaching	Organizational change	Company performance Firm performance Organization Performance Organizational Performance
Company needs	Company needs Organization needs	Performers	Performers
competence	competence	Potential Skills	Potential Skill Potential Skills
Corporate culture	Company culture Corporate culture Organizational culture	Potentials	Potentials
culture fit	culture fit	Recognition	Recognition
development	development	Recovery	Economic growth Economic recovery Economy growing
economic situation	economic situation	Recruitment	Recruitment
Economic crisis	2008 crisis bad economy economic depression worst situation	Rewards	Rewards

employee	employee employees staff Individual Individuals workers workforce worker	skills	Abilities capabilities job skills work skills Current skills
employee development	employee development	Social media	facebook Instagram LinkedIn Pinterest Social media Social Networks Twitter
employee engagement	employee engagement	Succession management	Succession management
employee needs	Employee needs Employees needs Employee need	succession planning	succession planning
Employee value proposition	Employee value proposition EVP	Talent attraction	Attracting talent Talent attraction
Employer branding	Employee brand Employee branding Best working place	Talent identification	Talent identification
Engagement	Engagement	Talent pipeline	Talent pipeline
External recruitment	external recruiting external recruitment	Talent pool	Talent pool
Generation X	Generation X	Talent supply	Talent supply
Generation Y	Generation Y	Training	Training
hiring	hiring		